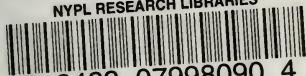


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THIRTY-FOUR LETTERS

TO A

SON IN THE MINISTRY.

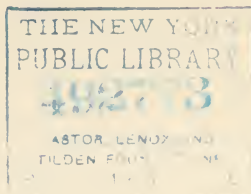
BY

REV. HEMAN HUMPHREY,

PRESIDENT OF AMHERST COLLEGE.



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P R E F A C E.

THE following Letters, addressed to a beloved son in the ministry, have been put to press with the hope that the outline of ministerial and pastoral duties, which I have attempted to sketch for his benefit, may afford some profitable hints to others, who are just entering the sacred profession, or have not been long enough in it to derive a great deal of instruction from the best of all earthly teachers, *experience*. I cannot forget, that to this number belong several hundred young brethren, in whom I feel a peculiar interest, on account of the relations which we sustained to each other during the Collegiate stage of their preparation for the great work to which God has called them. And frankly to confess, that nothing could gratify me more, than to have each and all of them receive these letters, as from an affectionate father, would only be saying, that this is the light in which I should love to be regarded by them as long as I live.

I am not ignorant, that much has been written by men of deep piety, distinguished abilities and large experience, on all the prominent topics embraced in

this volume ; and I have not the vanity to suppose, that I have treated any one of them as well, as some who have gone before me—much less that the intelligent reader will find anything new as he turns over these pages. In penning them I have consulted no human authorities except on the single subject of Revivals. My object has been, to submit simply the results of my own experience and reflections, in a familiar way, to the candid perusal and judgment of those who “watch for souls,” and whose “hearts’ desire and prayer to God is, that they may be saved,” If I might venture, without taking too much upon myself, to call this *The Young Pastor’s Manual*, and if it should be found to occupy a place, which needed to be filled by some work of the kind, I shall feel myself richly rewarded for all the time and toil it has cost me.

Amherst Coll. April 16, 1842.

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LETTERS

TO A

SON IN THE MINISTRY.

LETTER I.

MY DEAR E.

YOUR letter of the 24th came safely to hand, and the perusal of it has awakened in my mind and that of your dear Mother the most tender and grateful recollections. It was our earnest prayer, when we received you from the Lord, that he would early renew and sanctify you by his spirit, and prepare you to preach the everlasting Gospel. In the indulgence of this hope, we sent you to College, and in your Junior year we were, to our great joy, permitted to witness your reception into the church, and to sit down with you at the table of the Lord. This great change in your views and relations, soon fixed your choice of a profession. The law and political distinctions no longer fired your youthful bosom with a feverish and perilous ambition; but we trust you was enabled, by the grace of God, to “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ,”

and to aspire to the honor of becoming an “ambassador for Christ,” that you might “beseech sinners in his stead to be reconciled to God.”

With this view you went to the Theological Seminary of A——, where you spent three years, under the instruction of eminent professors, and in the enjoyment of every advantage for acquiring a thorough biblical and theological education. Those years are past. You have, as you inform me, just presented your credentials and been examined and licensed to preach the Gospel. Can it be, that you have so soon grown to manhood; gone through all the regular stages of education, and are now about to appear in the sanctuary, as one of the sons of Levi, and to engage in preparatory services, for consecration to the christian priesthood? It seems to us more like a dream, than a momentous reality.

The step, my dear son, which you have now taken, is one of the most important that a young man, entering upon the duties of life, can take. “You have opened your mouth unto the Lord, and cannot go back.” You are still, it is true, a private member of the church, just as you was before. Your license to preach for a limited time, does not invest you with the sacred office, nor would it, if it were *unlimited*. But you are now duly authorized to take a position, for the trial and improvement of your gifts, in which no one can rightfully place himself, without the consent and approbation of those, who “are set for the defence of the Gospel.” Though you are not a pastor, and not a minister, in the technical and ecclesiastical sense of the term; although you can-

not administer the sacraments of the New Testament, baptism and the Lord's supper, you will be received by the churches as an accredited and regular preacher; and if your sermons are able, instructive, evangelical and well delivered, you will be listened to with interest and profit, as a messenger of the living God. Your message will be just the same, as if you had already passed under the consecrating hands of the presbytery. There is not one gospel for the licentiate to preach, and another for the ordained minister. A sermon which it would not be suitable for you to deliver, were you a pastor, it cannot be suitable for you to preach, as a candidate. You may take no more liberties in the pulpit, or out of it now, than at any future time, should God "count you worthy, putting you into the ministry." Every doctrine which will be true then, is true now; and every duty must always, under like circumstances be the same.

I do not say, that as great responsibility rests upon the licentiate, as upon the settled pastor. Far from it. The two positions hardly admit of a comparison. But so far as *preaching* is concerned, I cannot see that there is any essential difference. As I have already remarked, the Gospel is ever the same. When you appeared before the body that licensed you, you virtually promised to preach, as God might give you opportunity, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, according to your best understanding of the scriptures. Had there been any essential doctrine, on which you had not made up your mind, it would have been your duty to say so, before you took your license, and as clearly the duty of your examin-

ers, also, to withhold it, till you should make up your mind. This rushing into the battle, before one's armor is half on, is miserable trifling and temerity.

The grand object of your first sermon, of your second sermon, of your third and of every sermon you preach before your settlement, as well as afterwards, ought to be to do good, to edify the church, to awaken sinners, or in some way to further directly the great ends of preaching the gospel. With this view, every one of your early discourses ought to be prepared as under the eye of Jesus Christ, and to be preceded and followed by fervent prayer for his blessing. Remember, my son, that though you should never be ordained and become a pastor, you must stand "before the judgment seat of Christ," and give an account of your preaching, under the license which you have just received. It will be in vain for you to plead, that you was only a candidate and was not aware of your responsibility. It must be your own fault if you was not. How infinitely important, then, so to preach, should it be for only a single sabbath, as to receive the reward of a good and faithful servant. I could name to you many pious and distinguished pastors, whose labours were eminently blessed almost as soon as they entered the pulpit, and before they were settled or ordained. How would it rejoice my heart to hear, that the Lord is with you wherever you go, and that your "speech and your preaching, is not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and with power."

I shall hope ere long, to see and hear you in the

pulpit; but not just yet. I know by experience, how trying it is to preach, for the first time, before parents, friends, neighbours and old acquaintances. You will do better to begin among strangers; and when you have become a little accustomed to speaking before a congregation, you will be more at ease, and do yourself and the great cause which you have espoused more justice at home.

It is not the place to go, as fully as I may wish hereafter, into the subject of *manner* in the pulpit. But I deem it proper to throw out a few hints, which may be of use to you. Hardly anything prejudices the most serious and enlightened members of a congregation against a young candidate so much, as to see him skip like a stage player up the pulpit stairs and take up the Bible as irreverently as a school boy does his lexicon; and then to see him, after giving out the psalm, carefully adjusting his cravat and every lock of hair, and gazing round upon the audience as if more curious to know who is present to hear him, than mindful of his high commission, or conscious of his own nothingness. O how painful and disgusting, to see a mere novice, before the ink is fairly dry upon his license, flourishing his fine cambric handkerchief, and showing off his pretty hand, where an angel would tremble to appear, and with an air of self complacency throwing himself into attitudes, and grappling at once with the most knotty points in theology, as if he was "the man, and wisdom would die with him."

These are faults, my son, which I am sure your good sense, to say nothing of your religion, will teach you

to avoid. I do not wish you to put on an affected humility and sanctimoniousness when you enter the pulpit. This would be going into the opposite extreme. But let your step, your countenance, your attitudes, your tones of voice, your whole deportment evince, that you have come from your closet, not to show off yourself, but to honor and recommend your Divine Master; not to attract to a poor, sinful, dying worm those eyes which should ever be fixed upon the cross of Calvary.

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER II.

MY DEAR E.

I AM glad to learn from a friend who heard your first sermon, that you went through the services with a good degree of propriety and self-possession. We remembered you and felt for you, and our prayer was, not so much that your performances might be acceptable to the people, as that you might commend yourself to God, in the earnest and faithful exhibition of his truth. You ask for advice with reference to your future course; and you know it affords me great pleasure to give you my best thoughts, on all questions of duty and expediency. I do not wish you to seek for an immediate settlement. I hope you will not, for some time, be thrown into circumstances making it your duty to preach as a candidate. You are not yet four and twenty. You have not attained to that physical maturity, which is requisite for entering with safety upon the arduous duties of the sacred profession. Though you are probably as athletic now as you ever will be, it will take several more years to compact and consolidate your system. Many a young preacher has broken down his health, by settling prematurely, who might have served God and his generation through a long and useful ministry, if he had not been hurried into the profession.

While I am writing this letter, the painful intelligence has reached us, that the Rev. B—— H——, a

graduate of this College, and a young man of great promise, has died suddenly of brain-fever, at the age of *twenty-four*. Without taking any time to rest, after he left College, he betook himself with even more than his characteristic ardor to theological studies, at A——, which he completed last September, and in November, was settled at B——; and now, before the end of March, he is in his grave! That he acted conscientiously in thus pressing on, I have not the shadow of a doubt nor that his confidential advisers, *so far* as they encouraged him, meant it for good; but that he entered upon the pastoral care too soon, I am equally well convinced. He had fine talents, his mind was highly cultivated and richly furnished; but he was too young, and I may add, too *popular*, for such a charge. He was always rather slender, than robust. What sermons he had were highly finished and greatly admired; but they could not have lasted long, and he unquestionably felt himself constrained to make efforts, which his physical constitution could not bear. Had he gone home, when he left the Seminary, and taken a year or two to recruit, and to write sermons, in some such course as I am advising you to take, I cannot help thinking that his valuable life might have been saved.

And this leads me to make another remark. It is now much more necessary that young men should have age and health and a good stock of materials before hand, than it was half a century ago. Much more is required and expected. To give satisfaction, their discourses must be more polished and finished. They are expected to preach much oftener on week-

days, and to attend many more private religious meetings. Then, there is also the Bible Class and the Sabbath School; and besides all these, a great amount of labor in one form and another, to keep the benevolent enterprizes of the church in healthy and vigorous action. In one word, the service is a great deal harder than it used to be; and therefore, it requires more time and experience and physical maturity and intellectual affluence to be prepared for it.

You, my son, are now a mere beginner. Writing sermons is comparatively a new business; and you can testify, that it is hard work. If you take upon yourself the pastoral care, you will soon have to bring out your two discourses on the sabbath, besides preparing for week day lectures; and let me ask, how much time it has hitherto cost you to write *one* sermon? A soldier should have a good supply of cartridges, or at least should learn how to make them with facility, before he approaches the enemy's lines. I know very well, that if your early preaching should prove acceptable to a vacant congregation, and the people should set their hearts upon you as the right man for them, they will tell you, you may exchange for the first year or two, as much as you please, and get what other help you can. This will be kindly intended, and very flattering withal; but you will find it not so convenient to avail yourself of the indulgence, as you may imagine. The weeks come round with a young minister, amazingly quick. Brethren in the vicinity will have their own duties and plans, which will often render it difficult for them to exchange, when you most need the accommoda-

tion. Saturday night will come without bringing along the agent, or clerical friend on whom you was depending, and you will be in great trouble. Where now are the two sermons, which must be preached in less than twenty-four hours, to come from? Besides, you will soon be convinced, that having so many different preachers, is neither edifying to the church, nor profitable to the congregation; and a sense of duty to your people will urge you on to efforts quite beyond your strength—efforts which will greatly endanger your health, and may bring you to an early grave. My advice then is, that instead of looking out for an early settlement, you decline preaching anywhere as a candidate, for a year, or two at least; and that you listen to no call, if you can help it.—I mean unless the voice of God should be so clear in it, that you can say, “necessity is laid upon me.”

Do you ask what course you had better take—how I would advise you to spend your time before you enter upon the pastoral office? My answer is, spend it in *preparation* for that high and sacred office. You are pledged to devote yourself to the work of the christian ministry; and there is no possibility of your being too well fitted for it. You are bound, therefore, not only to keep it constantly in view, but so to exercise your gifts, and enrich your mind with divine truth, that when you come to be settled, you may prove yourself “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” I will mention several ways in which you may employ your time to good advantage.

You may, if you choose, spend a year or more, as

resident graduate at A——, reviewing your theological studies, writing sermons and preaching on the sabbath, as you have opportunity. I hardly know how a young preacher could be more favorably situated for intellectual improvement, or for cultivating some of the more important gifts of the ministry. But the danger is, that if you remain at the seminary, you will imperceptibly relax and become self-indulgent, and not accomplish half so much as you expect to. When you go out to preach, as you have nothing special to call you back, you will be tempted to linger a day or two longer than necessary. And when you are on the ground, you will be liable to a great many nameless interruptions, which will steal away your time and break up your habits of study, unless you have something stronger to bind you to regular hours, and a certain amount of work, than your good resolutions. *To-morrow* is the greatest thief of time in the world. I see you early at your desk. A sermon partly written is before you, and your fixed purpose is to finish it before you sleep. But your thoughts do not flow so freely as you expected, or some one comes in and wants to *talk*, or you begin to feel a slight head-ache before the task is accomplished, or you have a polite invitation to dine, which takes up the whole afternoon and evening, and so the sermon is put off till to-morrow; and it is well, if two, or three other to-morrows, do not leave it unfinished by similar interruptions.

Besides, should you remain long as a resident graduate at the Seminary, will you not be liable to become discontented; to feel that you are contract-

ing habits of mental dissipation, and spending your time to but little purpose ; and will not this very uneasiness disqualify you for vigorous and persevering efforts ? I do not say, my son, that you will certainly experience all or any of the drawbacks, which I have hinted at. I believe that some resident licentiates do extremely well, for one or two years. Probably they could not anywhere do more, to prepare themselves for future usefulness ; but can it be said of all ? I do not wish to dictate. If you wish to stay and make the experiment, you have my approbation, especially as I have great confidence in your inflexible adherence to your plans and purposes. What I mean to say is, that before you make up your mind, you ought to look at the case as it is, and if you remain, to be on your guard against every untoward influence.

Another course which you can take is, to engage for a year or two in some *agency*. I am fully satisfied, that in the present state of the church, of the country, and of the world, our great religious societies must employ agents to diffuse information, organize local associations, collect funds, distribute Bibles, bound volumes and tracts, attend anniversaries and by every suitable measure and appeal to keep the condition of perishing continents and islands, continually before the public mind. - Some of these agents may be young men, recent graduates from our theological seminaries ; perhaps it is best they should be, although others also of more age, experience and influence are needed. If you wish to take an agency, and can get suitable recommendations, I have no ob-

jection. By the blessing of God, you may do much good, while at the same time you are benefiting yourself, and accumulating a valuable stock of knowledge and experience, to carry with you at a future day, into the ministry.

But let me give you a word of advice, in regard to the *kind* of agency in which you may engage. Although an agent is an *agent*, all the world over, and whatever may be the object of the society which employs him, it by no means follows, that all the agencies of these bustling times are equally important, or useful. There are some societies, of no measured pretensions, in whose service, I frankly confess, I should be very sorry to see you employed. You ought to satisfy yourself, before you engage, not only that the object is a good one, but that the means and measures, by which its friends seek to accomplish it, are judicious. More harm than good is sometimes done, by moving too soon, or moving too fast, even in the right direction. You might work very hard and from the best motives, and after all, more than lose your labor, by exciting prejudice against a good cause, or interfering with some better plan to promote it. Above all, I hope you will not listen to the first proposal that may happen to be made, and enlist merely to get something to do. Better be idle, than to be working, however unconsciously, against any of the great interests of society. And I hope you will never, like some others, think it your duty to engage upon the plan of retaining, as your salary, all the money you can collect, up to a certain sum, and then paying

over the surplus, if there should be any, to the treasurer of the society that employs you.

There is still another course that you might adopt, perhaps, to better advantage than either of the foregoing. Some young candidates, who do not wish to settle soon after they leave the Seminary, accept of invitations to supply small destitute parishes, where they can be retired, and write sermons, and perform ordinary parochial duties, and thus gradually prepare for the higher and more arduous responsibilities of the pastoral office. You can do the same, if a good opportunity should offer. But on two points, you should be decided before hand ; *First*, never to go and preach as a stated supply, where the people are able and ready to settle a good minister ; and *Secondly*, never to remain so long in any one place, as to make the impression upon the congregation, that it is better to hire by the six months, or year, than to settle a minister. Some parishes have been exceedingly injured, just in this way. Finding that they could be supplied with better preaching by employing candidates, than they can expect to command for the moderate salaries they could offer, they have fallen into the habit of depending upon *hire*, which, in the long run, is always highly prejudicial to the interests of religion.

I have one suggestion more, and only one, to make in answer to the question, what you shall do after leaving the Seminary, and before you enter upon the pastoral charge. If you prefer it, I have no doubt you can find employment as a *Home Missionary* ; and this, I confess, would be highly gratifying to my

own feelings. I should like to have you launch out a little, and see more of men and things, before you settle down for life. I think it might be of great advantage to you, to spend two or three years beyond the mountains; and perhaps the farther west you go, the better. I am aware, it may take you from us forever. Parental attachments would retain you, if possible, in New England, to close the eyes of your father and your mother; and if you go as a missionary to the west or south, it may become your duty to remain there. But if it should, I have nothing to say, only, "The Lord bless you and keep you," and make you more useful than you ever could have been in one of our congregations. Determining "the bounds of your habitation" belongs to God, and not to us. What I am now talking about, is a *temporary* mission, somewhere in the new settlements, or other destitute parts of the country. If you go, "commit your way unto the Lord, and he will direct your paths." "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Let it be your grand aim to do good, to glorify God, "to edify the body of Christ," and to save sinners, by preaching the gospel; by hunting up the lost sheep in the wilderness; by gathering new churches, or where they have already been formed, by "strengthening the things that remain and are ready to die." Thus by the blessing of God on your faithful labors, you may do much in a short time, to strengthen the weak, confirm the wavering, and make your good influence felt for a great while to come.

If you go, let your eyes and ears, as well as your lips, be open everywhere. Learn all you can about

the circumstances and spiritual wants of the people ; the errors that prevail ; the vices that abound ; the destitution of the scriptures and other religious books in those wide regions ; the manner in which the sabbath is regarded, the progress of temperance, or intemperance ; the state and prospects of popular education ; and in a word, about *everything* which has either a more immediate, or remote bearing upon the temporal and spiritual interests, of the rapidly increasing population of the field in which you labor, or the regions through which you pass. Thus your eye and your ear will affect your heart, and whether you return to settle in New England, or remain and spend your days in the "Great Valley," you will have laid the foundation for more extensive influence and usefulness than if you had always staid by the graves of the Pilgrims.

Very affectionately, &c.

LETTER III.

MY DEAR E.

OF the four plans, or courses, which I proposed for your consideration when you left the Seminary, you chose the last. You went out under the patronage of the Home Missionary Society. You have now been absent more than two years from New England. You have seen something of the Great West, and have heard more than you have seen. We have been expecting your return for some time, and have, I honestly confess, been secretly hoping that your Master might call you to some field of usefulness in our own State. But you inform me, that having declined other invitations, you are now solicited to go and preach as a candidate for settlement in L——. From my general knowledge of the place, and from your account of the condition and prospects of the congregation, I have no doubt the vacancy is a very important one ; and if you are the man to fill it, you may do great good there—perhaps as much as anywhere. Should the invitation be repeated, I dare not object to your giving the people an opportunity to hear you.

But, my dear son, if you go, I have several things to say to you, which I am quite sure you will take into serious consideration.

In the first place, should you consent to preach as a candidate in L——, or any other place, *take time*

enough. I do not like these hasty settlements. What is done in a hurry, is very apt to be undone in the same manner. You ought to give the people ample time, whether they wish it or not, to become acquainted with you in the pulpit and out of the pulpit, in the lecture room, in the prayer meeting, and, by familiar social intercourse. And you ought to give yourself opportunity to get acquainted with them, to see most of their families, to find out the condition of the church, and the character and standing of leading members, both of the church and of the congregation. I know this is not the popular doctrine. Everybody is now in a hurry. Everything must go by steam, and the greater the pressure upon the square inch, the better, let who will, be blown up in the race.

Three or four sabbaths, is thought a very long probation—so protracted and tedious, that some candidates, though they have never been settled and are perfect strangers in the place, are unwilling to submit to it. And the people are just about as much in a hurry, as the candidates. Two or three weeks, they think, will do very well; and if they like the young man, they want to do up the work at once, that they may have it over and go about something else. Some congregations will even take up with one sabbath, if they can get no more, and make out their papers upon a couple of sermons, which may have cost the writer three months labor.

Now you know, my son, that I am not only an old man, but an *old fashioned man*. I am afraid of steam, especially with raw engineers and weak boil-

ers. When I was a candidate for settlement, it was customary, at least in New England, to preach *three* or *four months* on probation. I preached *three months* myself, and always had reason to be glad of it. It afforded me advantages in my subsequent connection with the people, which I could not have gained in any other way. Were I to be young, and go over the same ground again, I would lengthen, rather than shorten the term. It is alarming to see how ministers in this age of innovation, are *hurried* into the pulpit and hurried out of it; and I have no doubt at all, that these frequent changes are owing in a great degree, to this, that congregations do not give themselves time enough to find out whether they like the candidate, as a preacher and a man, or not, and candidates, by shortening the term of probation, go upon equal uncertainties. Take time enough, I say, as a probationer, before you settle anywhere.

In the next place, beware not to begin on a higher key than you can hold out—not to create expectations which you cannot come up to. It is always bad policy to strike *twelve* the first time. Allowing that you could always keep it up, it would be only *twelve, twelve*—no increase, no advance, till many would be quite sure, that they must have miscounted; that you really never did strike twelve, as they had supposed: or at any rate, that if the count was right, the strokes are all the while growing feebler. A young candidate cannot err in judgment more egregiously, than by taking along with him the half dozen sermons, which he wrote with great care and labor in the seminary, delivering them one after another, in

his very best style, and making them the sole basis of a call to settle. Woe to the man who gets a call in this way. What will he do when two sermons a week are demanded, besides all his other labors? Where are they to come from? He has sold out his stock, or at any rate the best of it, before commencing business. He has a fine parish and a pleasant location, to be sure, and perhaps a great many well educated and highly respectable hearers; but when they come to listen to such discourses as he can prepare from sabbath to sabbath, they are disappointed. They are sure, he preached better before they settled him, and they soon become convinced that he is not the first rate man they took him to be. They are dissatisfied, they whisper to one another, that they have been taken in, and very soon put him as much below his proper level, as he had put himself above, in his first sermons.

Or if he is a man of real talents, perceiving how disastrous it must be for him, as a settled *pastor*, to fall below himself, as a *candidate*, he can hardly help feeling constrained to make efforts quite beyond his strength; and it is a wonder, if he does not in a few months break himself entirely down. He may be conscious that he is wearing upon the naked thread of life, and may see his mistake, in exciting expectations, which it is extremely hazardous for him to attempt to meet; but the die is cast, he cannot disappoint and mortify his friends. He presses on, till the thread snaps, and the tears of a mourning people testify how much they loved him.

Now you know very well, my dear son, that I

never wish to have you preach a *poor* sermon, either as a candidate, or a settled pastor. But let me earnestly advise you, not to bring out all your best thoughts, not to preach your very best sermons, while you are on probation. You will want them more, another day. The safest and best course, altogether, and I will add, the most honest is, to give the people a fair sample of what they may reasonably expect, should you become their pastor. I would therefore advise you, by all means, to prepare some of your discourses on the spot, both to satisfy yourself what you can do, and to furnish your hearers with specimens upon which to make up their opinions. If they like your ordinary sermons well enough to give you a call, you will enter upon your ministry with a fair prospect of rising in their estimation and confidence.

In the next and last place, preach your sentiments fully and honestly before you settle. The church and congregation have a right to know just what you think, on the great controverted points of theology, and what they are to expect, if you become their pastor. Be as open as the day in declaring your doctrinal opinions. Conceal nothing, from an apprehension that some of the people may differ from you, and so demur to your settlement. What if they do? How much better to meet the difficulty here and retire quietly, than to find yourself in a quarrel with a part of the congregation, before you are fairly warm in your place. There is a blind way of exhibiting offensive doctrines, when a man is on probation, which is as impolitic, as it is disingenuous. He will assuredly

get himself into trouble, if he becomes more pointed and direct after he is ordained. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

On this point, (and I may have frequent occasion to do the same thing,) I will give you a little of my own experience. It might seem to a stranger too much like vain boasting; but I have nothing to fear, on that score, in these familiar epistles to a beloved son. When I went to preach as a candidate in F——, more than thirty years ago, the church was in a very low state. I was called to address an intelligent and highly respectable congregation, but the people had been unaccustomed to discriminating doctrinal preaching. The *half way covenant*, as it was called, had been "owned" and acted upon for several generations; and under it most of the families had been baptized. My own settled conviction was, that none but believing parents, in full church communion, had any scriptural warrant for offering their children in baptism, and of course, that I could not administer the ordinance upon the strength of their merely "owning the covenant." As they had invited me to preach upon probation, I thought it my duty to take the matter up in the pulpit; and not only tell the congregation, that I could not conform to the existing usage, but to give the reasons why. This I did in full, in several discourses, which were listened to with much apparent interest. I preached also, on all the doctrines which I believed to be essential, and some of which I had reason to expect would not be favourably received. Strange as it may seem, and as it did seem to me, at the end of

three months they gave me an unanimous call. Nearly all my probationary sermons I prepared from week to week, as I went along. I cannot say, that nobody objected to "hard sayings" after I was settled, or that I met with no trouble from parents wishing to have their children baptized, upon the old half way covenant; but this frank and full avowal of my sentiments gave me an immense advantage. Nobody pretended that I had deceived them. I could appeal to the whole congregation; I could appeal to my manuscripts, that I had "kept back nothing," when I was on trial, and it saved me infinite trouble. Bring out your views clearly. Never stop to ask whether the people will relish this or that doctrine, or whether it will be any bar in the way of your getting a call; if you deem it true and important, preach it. Whatever may be the result, you will have a clear conscience, and your Master can, if you are sent away, and he pleases, give you a much better field to labor in.

With unabated affection, &c.

LETTER IV.

MY DEAR E.

I perceived from the post mark of your last letter, before I opened it, that you had left L——, and you inform me, that a call has been put into your hands, inviting you with great unanimity, to return and settle there. I do not wonder that this invitation has awakened a new train of thoughts and feelings in your mind. The decision to be made in a few days, or weeks, at most, is one of no ordinary moment. It brings directly before you all the duties and responsibility of the pastoral office. Has God called you to the work of the ministry? Is it his pleasure to set you as a watchman somewhere upon the walls of Zion; and if so, is the present call from Him, as well as from the second Presbyterian Church and Congregation in L——?

The first of these questions was so far settled in your mind, when you left the Theological Seminary of A——, and received a license to preach, that trusting in the "Spirit to help your infirmities," you resolved to go forward. This resolution I approved of. You had thought much on the subject, and long made it a matter of special prayer. You had taken the best advice you could obtain from christian friends and acquaintances, both clergymen and laymen. They encouraged you to go on; and though not without much self-distrust and trembling, you have

now advanced to the foot of the altar. Shall you take the only remaining step by giving an affirmative answer, being by "prayer and the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery," set over the people who have called you? You ask for advice.

What sort of a call, then, have they given you? If it contains the modern condition of leaving, or being sent away, upon *three* or *six* months' notice, I disapprove of it altogether. Of all modern miscalled improvements, this, in my judgment, is one of the most objectionable. As I have not time, nor space, to state my objections fully in this letter, I refer you to a discourse which I delivered some years ago, before the General Association of Massachusetts. A few thoughts, however, I cannot refrain from throwing out, as I hasten to other topics. If you were destined to the missionary service, you might very properly be ordained, "with your loins girded about, and your staff in your hand." But I do not wish to see you *settled* on horse-back, nor under any prospective warning to leave town at the shortest notice. It is absurd. The old way is infinitely better; and I am persuaded, that both ministers and churches will be convinced of it, when they have suffered one or two generations longer, under the new system. Indeed, if I do not greatly mistake the signs of the times, there is a favorable change now going on in the public mind, with reference to this subject. There are fewer settlements upon the, (what shall I call it?) upon the "half-way" ministerial "covenant," than there were some dozen years ago.

If any one wishes to contract by the year, for so

much, like any other hired man, he can do it ; though I should strongly object to such a departure from ecclesiastical usage, except under very peculiar circumstances. Every congregation that can sustain a minister, ought to have one permanently settled. But the plan of hiring preaching by the year, is on some accounts less objectionable, than that of three or six months' warning. It savors very much of solemn mockery, to invite a candidate to preach upon trial ; to give him a regular call for settlement ; to receive and consider his answer ; to convene the presbytery, or other ecclesiastical council, for the express purpose of putting him over the church and congregation ; to give him the apostolic charge and the right hand of fellowship—in short, to install him with all the solemnities of ancient usage, and at the same time virtually to undo it all, by sanctioning a written contract for a dissolution of the union, at the will of either of the parties. I do not believe, the great Head of the Church will ever approve such egregious trifling with holy things. It has done infinite mischief already. While it retains the *forms* of permanent settlement, it explicitly prepares the way for frequent and capricious changes. What, under this system, becomes of the sacredness which belongs to the pastoral relation ? How can a minister ever feel himself at home anywhere, or leave a home for his family when he is taken away by the stroke of death ? How can the people love him as their pastor and teacher ; nay how can they dare to love him, when the connection may be so easily dissolved ?

You do not tell me, whether your call contains the

three months' proviso, or not. If it does, I hope you will anxiously enquire, how far it is right to sanction it in your answer. I do not mean absolutely to advise you to decline on this ground alone ; for I am well aware, it is not in the power of a single young man, or of many who are just entering the ministry, to resist the current. Public opinion must be gradually changed by argument and experience. But you can at least express your disapprobation of the plan, as hostile to the best interests of the church, and exert your influence hereafter to bring things back to their former state.

Wherever you may settle, you will need some little vacation occasionally, for recruiting your health and visiting your friends. What the common law of K—— is on this point, or whether any such indulgence is offered in the call which you now have under consideration, I do not know. If nothing is said about it, and you are inclined to accept the call, I advise you to make it one of the conditions of settlement that you may be absent two, three or four sabbaths, in each year, without either expense, or responsibility in providing a supply. This is so reasonable, that if the people of L—— are really anxious to secure you, they will readily accede to your wishes. If they decline, it will be a pretty clear indication, that they are, upon the whole, quite willing to try another candidate. When you have got the liberty, however, use it in the fear of God, and with an eye steadily fixed upon the best interests of the church. Never leave your pulpit, merely because you have a right by contract to be absent for a longer or a shorter time,

Some years the state of things in your congregation may forbid your leaving them at all, without the most urgent necessity ; and then again, in other years, you may want more time than you have stipulated for, which will no doubt be readily granted. You may perhaps think me over anxious and careful in regard to this point, or even wonder why I have touched upon it at all. But I have lived nearly twice as long in the world as you have, and I do assure you, there is nothing like having a full understanding between a minister and his people at the outset. If nothing is said about allowing him an occasional vacation when he needs it, they may be willing to give him the indulgence, or they may not.

Before you give your answer, make yourself well acquainted with the condition both of the church and the congregation. If any are opposed to your settlement, or are luke-warm about it, consider who they are, what is their standing, what is their influence, what are the grounds of their opposition, and what the probabilities of its gaining strength, or being overcome. I do not think that a candidate ought to be frightened away by every groundless prejudice, or unruly tongue, for then in many congregations, it would be impossible ever to secure the blessings of a stated ministry ; but on the other hand, it is worse than folly, to go where there is no reasonable prospect of comfort and usefulness.

It not unfrequently happens, especially where churches have been for some years vacant, that bad cases of discipline accumulate, to the great perplexity of young and inexperienced pastors. How it may

be in the church of L——, I do not know ; but I advise, I *charge* you as a father his son, to enquire. There may be chronic cases of the very worst kind—so inveterate, that it would be in the highest degree imprudent for any young man to settle, till they are disposed of. If cases of less difficulty linger, try to have them issued before you assume the pastoral care, or if that cannot be done, get a promise that they shall be carried through, as soon after as possible. These precautions may save you a vast deal of trouble.

Extend your enquiries to everything pertaining to the state both of the church and the congregation. It is your right, and every body will like you the better for it. I should be very sorry to see you placed in so awkward a position, as I myself was, after I had given my answer to the church and society of F——. When all the arrangements for the ordination were made, it occurred to me, that I had not seen the Confession of Faith and Covenant. I accordingly enquired for the church records ; and judge of my surprise when I found, that the articles were so extremely indefinite and general, as to admit almost any person into the church, who might choose to apply. What was to be done ? I could not take the oversight of a church resting upon such a platform ; and how was it possible in the few days that were left, to substitute a new Confession and Covenant ? My mind was soon made up. I went to one of the wisest and most respectable members of the church, and after stating my objections to the articles as I found them, told him frankly that I could not pro-

ceed. He received me kindly, but seemed alarmed. I proposed calling the whole church together to see what they would do. He and others whom I consulted were afraid of the consequences, but finally consented, and arrangements were made for drawing up and presenting a new Orthodox and Calvinistic Confession. The church met. The two confessions, the old and the new, were taken up, examined, and explained. The new one was adopted, I believe unanimously. Some of my best friends had urged me to wait till after the ordination. But I felt it my duty to bring the matter to an issue at once, that I might "go to the right hand or to the left." Settle I would not, upon such uncertainties; and had I waited, I am quite sure the change would not have been made.

As the church to which you are called is a presbyterian church, you know what the creed is without asking; and I refer you to my own experience in the case just stated, merely to illustrate the importance of having a mutual understanding on all points, before you take the last step, and to have everything done that can be, to save future difficulty.

There is but one topic more, so far as I can now recollect, which I wish to touch upon in this letter, and that is *pecuniary support*. This I know is regarded by some as too delicate, or too mercenary a topic, to be mentioned by a father to his son, in such a connection. But why so? An Apostle has told us, that "the laborer is worthy of his hire." And again; "do ye not know that they which minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple? and

they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath God ordained, that they which preach the gospel shall live of the gospel.” To brand a minister, therefore, with the opprobrious epithet of *hireling*, because he wishes to receive a salary adequate to his comfortable support, that he may give himself wholly to his work, is “reproaching the Lord”—is casting contumely upon one of his ordinances. I know very well, that the *amount* of compensation must vary indefinitely, according to circumstances. Where the people are poor, and ready to do what they can to support their minister, and his labors are blessed, he ought to be satisfied with much less than he might expect if they were able to pay him a liberal salary. I can conceive, that it might be your duty to settle upon less than the actual cost of supporting a family, and to make up the deficiency by teaching school, or in some other way. Nay, I would by all means, have you preach the gospel and sustain yourself by “tent making,” as Paul did, or by anything you can turn your hand to, rather than not preach at all. But then, the circumstances must be similar. “To the poor the gospel must be preached” at any rate, and to the heathen. But where a church and congregation are possessed of ample means, a candidate has a right to expect, that when they call him, they will make liberal provision for his maintenance.

I have no doubt, though you have not told me, that the people of L—— have offered you what they considered to be a generous support; and it may be all that you could ask, or even more. But it is perfectly proper, that you should enquire what it

will cost to support a family in L—— ; nay, I hold it to be your duty to enquire ; and now, before you give your answer, is the best time. Be perfectly frank and free in your enquiries. Tell the people you want no more than is reasonable, but that as you are a young man without experience, it is impossible to make the estimate for yourself. You have no way but to rely upon their better judgment ; and there should be a perfect understanding between you, that if your salary proves inadequate, it shall be increased as circumstances may require.

One word more. I advise you by all means to stipulate for *quarterly* or semi-annual payments. You will find it extremely inconvenient to wait till the end of the year before you receive any part of your salary. You will want it to live on, as you go along ; and the money in hand, when you make your purchases, will be worth from ten to twenty per cent. more than your credit. Ministers are often exceedingly embarrassed, and obliged to borrow money where they can find it ; when if they had their pay quarterly, they could not only meet all their engagements promptly, but make their income go much further than it does. Nor is this quite all. Where the stipulation on the part of the parish is to pay annually, and no oftener, it is not by any means certain, that they will be ready at the end of the year. Another six or twelve months may elapse, before they settle up. If any body has got to wait, who so likely as the minister ?

I am affectionately, &c.

LETTER V.

MY DEAR E.

THE solemn day is past. You are now an ordained minister of the gospel. A branch of the church is committed to your pastoral care, and did you not, in the hour of your consecration, hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, "Feed my sheep—feed my lambs?" "Take heed therefore unto thyself, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made thee overseer, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

You are now not only authorized to "testify the gospel of the grace of God," as an accredited ambassador of Christ, but to administer the sacraments of the New Testament, baptism and the Lord's Supper; and to exercise all the functions of the pastoral office. "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Study to approve thyself unto God, a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing from whom thou hast learned them, and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of

God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season ; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine."

"Let no man despise thy youth ; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things ; give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear unto all. Take heed unto thyself and unto thy doctrine ; continue in them ; for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee. This is a true saying, if any man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. But a bishop must be blameless as the steward of God ; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre ; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate ; holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly. Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and has professed a good profession before many witnesses."

All this and more, was undoubtedly embodied in the charge which you received on the day of your ordination. I am aware, that the repetition of it here

can give it no additional force ; but as a father and a minister, I could not satisfy myself without going over the same ground in this connection ; and I am sure you will not object to receiving “ line upon line, and precept upon precept.” Most of the topics, embraced in the two preceding paragraphs, I propose to take up and enlarge upon at considerable length hereafter, “ if the Lord will.”

The solemnities of your ordination being over, you will now, as a matter of course, wish to sit down alone with your commission open before you, to meditate upon the responsibilities which you have assumed, and earnestly to inquire how you may best discharge the duties of the pastoral office. Let no man interrupt you, by breaking this solemn pause. You are upon holy ground, and in the presence of Him “ that dwelt in the bush.” Let the world and even your most intimate christian friends stand aloof, while you bow down to hear what the Lord will say unto you. You want time for prayer, for self-examination, for the girding up of your loins, before you go a step further. In a most important sense, you hold the destinies of undying souls in your hands. Such is the economy of grace, that it will depend very much on your faithfulness, or unfaithfulness, whether they are saved, or lost. Let me, therefore, earnestly and tenderly exhort you, my dear son, first of all, to commit yourself and your new charge unto the Lord, in fervent prayer. There cannot be a more fitting occasion for great enlargement and fervency in this duty, than when a young minister is just entering upon his high and holy vocation. How can you

do better for yourself, or for your church and congregation, than to spend one day, at least, in private fasting and prayer, and in reviewing the mercies of your whole life, before you enter upon the duties and trials of the pastoral office. It cannot but be exceedingly interesting at this solemn moment, to “remember all the ways in which the Lord thy God hath led thee, these *seven and twenty years* to humble thee and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments, or no.” Methinks I can see you upon your knees, in your closet, while I am writing this letter, and hear you breathe out the sentiments of the following prayer.

O thou infinite Source of being and of blessedness ; wilt thou suffer thine unworthy servant to come to the throne of grace in the way of thine own appointment, even through Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. I thank thee that I was not born in a heathen land. I thank thee that I was not taught in childhood to bow down before stocks and stones ; but that my infant tongue was taught to lisp, “Our Father who art in heaven,” before I could “discern between my right hand and my left.” I thank thee that while many other children about me were left to grow up in ignorance and vice, I was taught to fear God and keep his commandments, to keep the sabbath and reverence the sanctuary. I thank thee that when I was a giddy and thoughtless boy, I was guided, guarded and restrained by parental watchfulness and solicitude. I bless thee for all the advantages of education in the family, in the

school, in the academy, and in the college; and I thank and praise thee that when I was impenitent, and stupid, and wandering, and loving to wander from the right way, thou wast pleased in infinite mercy, to pour out thy spirit upon the institution with which I was connected, and to arrest my attention; to show me the desperate wickedness of my heart, and as I humbly trust, to make me “willing in the day of thy power.”

O thou Infinite Redeemer, I bless and praise thee, that when I cried, “Lord what wilt thou have me to do?” my feet were directed to the Seminary in A——, and that there I enjoyed such excellent advantages for spiritual, as well as intellectual and professional improvement. I thank thee that my forfeited life and health were spared, and that in due time I was licensed to preach the gospel. I thank thee that I found so much undeserved favor among the churches, in my occasional labors, before I came to this place, and “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful,” as I humbly hope he has in some small degree, “putting me into the ministry.”

But, O Lord, what am I, or my father’s house, that thou hast bestowed this honor upon me? Why was I taken, while others, far less unworthy, were left? Why am I here, and not a miserable dissipated prodigal, starving upon husks? Why was I not cut off in my impenitence, and why am I not now in the world of blasphemy and despair, instead of being called to “beseech sinners in Christ’s stead to be reconciled to God?” O Lord God, thou knowest; and I know

that it is infinite mercy which has made me to differ from the vilest outcast on earth, or the most miserable reprobate in hell.

And now, O Lord, here I am in all my unworthiness, in all my unfitness, just introduced into the pastoral office. It was but yesterday that I heard thy voice, "O son of man I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel, therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me." But, "Oh Lord, behold I cannot speak, for I am a child." How shall I go out and come in before this people? I can do nothing in my own strength; wilt thou strengthen me. I am a man of unclean lips; wilt thou touch my lips with a live coal from off thine altar. Wilt thou, O Lord, endow me with a double portion of thy spirit. Wilt thou put thoughts into my heart and words into my mouth. Wilt thou clothe me with righteousness and salvation, that thy saints may shout aloud for joy. Suffer me not to be deterred by frowns nor allured by flatteries, from making full proof of my ministry. In preaching the word, and in the discharge of every pastoral duty wilt thou make me faithful unto death, and then bestow upon me a crown of life, through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, "to whom be glory in the church, throughout all ages, world without end, Amen."

Very affectionately, &c.

LETTER VI.

MY DEAR E.

LET me now affectionately and faithfully “speak unto you, that *you go forward*.” Life is short. The work to which you have been set apart is a great work, and you have no time to lose. On the next Lord’s day, you will meet your people for the first time in the sanctuary, as their pastor and minister. You have met them there often; but it was before you was set over them in the Lord. If rightly improved, it will be a day long to be remembered by them and by you. You will then, if the Lord spares your life and health, enter publicly and solemnly upon your ministry in L——. It will be an eventful occasion—a golden opportunity for laying out your work, and making the right impression. Your church and congregation will come together, expecting to hear appropriate introductory discourses, and prepared to listen candidly to such an outline of your reciprocal duties, as the occasion calls for, and as is sanctioned by immemorial usage. Such another opportunity will never return. Once lost, therefore, it will be lost forever. You may have deeper hold upon the affections and confidence of your people, five or ten years hence, than you have now. But there is nothing exactly like the “first love” of a church and people to the man of their choice, when the tender recollections of his ordination

are all fresh in their minds. If he is young and inexperienced, they feel for him, and are ready, as by common consent, to say, when he comes to them with his commission fresh from the court of heaven, "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear whatever is commanded thee of God."

The two leading topics of your first sabbath, will be your own duties as a minister and pastor, and the duties of your people.

In regard to yourself, let me advise you, my dear son, to be perfectly frank and explicit in stating your views, with regard to what the great Head of the church expects and requires of you, as a gospel minister. Keep back nothing. Lay open your whole heart. The people will love you the better for it, and have the more confidence in you, as long as they live, even though your doctrines should not please them all. Men universally love to know before hand, what they are to expect. You will recollect, that while you was preaching as a candidate, I strongly advised you to exhibit a faithful outline of your theological opinions, so that every man might act understandingly upon the question of giving you a call. I presume you did. But now, something more will be expected. All your hearers may not agree with you, on every point: it would be singular if they should; but all will respect you the more, for a clear and conscientious statement of the views and feelings with which you enter upon your great work.

First of all, settle it both with your church and congregation, that you hold yourself responsible to God, and not to man, for the system of doctrines

which you have embraced, and which you intend to preach. On this head, you cannot be too explicit, as there are well-meaning persons, in almost every congregation, who need to be enlightened. While they readily admit, that a minister ought to take the word of God for his guide, their impression is, that he may modify his discourses on doctrinal points, with some regard to the opinions of his hearers. It is not very uncommon for this class of friends, first kindly to advise the newly settled pastor, not to dwell much upon what they call the hard doctrines, and then, if need be, to tell him, that it will not do ; for some of his respectable and influential supporters will not hear them.

Now I hope, my son, that in your first sermon, you will make your own duty to "preach the preaching which God hath bidden you," so clear, that no candid person will wish you to temporize in the slightest degree ; and that you will announce your determination not to "go beyond the word of the Lord, to say less or more," so distinctly, as to leave no hope of inducing you to swerve from your purpose, by any earthly consideration whatever. To convince all who are willing to be convinced, that to your own Master you stand or fall, will be an easy task. "Is the servant greater than his Lord, or he that is sent greater than he that sent him?" Whose ambassador are you, and to whom must you render an account, to men or to God ? What were Paul's sentiments on this subject ? "Necessity is laid upon me ; yea, woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel." "But as we are allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel,

even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts." "And now, behold I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." Passages like these must be decisive, with every candid mind; and it being settled once for all, that you cannot "confer with flesh and blood," as to the doctrines which you shall preach, or the code of christian ethics which you are to inculcate, the way will be prepared, in the

Next place, to specify those great and leading doctrines, of the truth and importance of which you have become fully convinced, by a diligent and prayerful study of the Scriptures. Some of your audience may be afraid you are going too far, for the times and place, and others may secretly resolve not to hear you, if they can help it, when you get upon controverted topics; but all will give you credit for honesty and plain dealing. You will not, I suppose, of course, specify when, or how often you intend to take up any disputed point in theology; but I hope you will give your people fully to understand, in your first sermon, that taking the Bible for your guide, you mean with Paul, on fitting occasions, to "declare all the counsel of God, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear."

You will have a fine opportunity, too, in your first discourses, to make your congregation acquainted with your habits of study, the hours which you wish

to devote, with as little interruption as possible, to your weekly preparations for the pulpit ; your views of pastoral duties, such as visiting the sick, the aged, the poor and the afflicted, attending funerals and the religious exercises which such occasions call for ; your views of weekly lectures and Bible classes, of visiting from house to house, and, in short, of all the stated and occasional duties which pertain to the " Pastoral Care."

Nor on such an occasion should you omit to touch upon ministerial *rights*, as well as *duties*. It will be easy to show, from the New Testament that as God has laid upon those whom he puts into the sacred office a most fearful responsibility, so he has clothed them with certain powers, of which their congregations cannot divest them. They and they only have a right to induct others into the christian ministry, and to administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper ; and though they may not " lord it over God's heritage," they are in a limited and subordinate sense, made rulers in the household of faith, not for their own elevation, but for the order and peace of the church.

It may, moreover, save you a great deal of trouble, to state in the outset, that according to your view of the ministerial office, if such *is* your view, every pastor has a right to determine, with whom he will exchange labors ; whom he will invite into his pulpit ; what topics he will introduce on the sabbath and at other times ; what appointments he will make for weekly lectures and prayer meetings ; what system of *doctrines* shall be preached, and what *measures*

shall be pursued in times of special revival. He will of course, if he is a wise and discreet pastor, consult his session or his deacons and perhaps other intelligent members of his church, on some or all of these points. What I mean to say is, that the *right* is with him, and that to overrule and coerce him, is subversive of ecclesiastical order ;—is breaking down the safe-guards of the pastoral office. True he may be incompetent and heady, and the cause of religion may suffer exceedingly under his mismanagement. When this is the case, there is undoubtedly a remedy, and it ought to be applied. If he will not, or cannot meet the responsibilities of his sacred charge, let him be induced to withdraw, or be removed in a regular way, and let a better man be put into his place ; but while he remains, let him at least enjoy the respect which is due to his office.

Having on your first sabbath marked out the course which with God's help you intend to pursue, and glanced at the duties, rights and trials of the ministry, I hope you will not fail of earnestly and affectionately reminding your people of their duties, which grow out of this new relation, and showing them how they may "strengthen your hands and encourage your heart." They will expect it, and should by no means be disappointed. Throw yourself at once into their arms, and make them feel, that they have got to sustain you by their prayers, by their sympathies and by their influence. Nothing can be easier than to satisfy every reasonable mind, that the duties of a minister and his congregation are reciprocal. You can make it as clear as the

light to those who are just now coming under your pastoral care, that if it is your duty to preach, it is their duty to come and hear ; that if you are bound to preach all the doctrines of the gospel, they are equally bound to listen to them ; that if it is your duty to bring “beaten oil into the sanctuary,” it is their duty to allow you time to prepare it ; that if you are required to visit them as a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ, they are bound to receive you in that capacity ; that if it is your duty to appoint and attend religious meetings out of season, it is their duty also to be present ; and so of everything else, pertaining to your reciprocal duties and relations. If you do all these things well the first sabbath, there is reason to believe, it will be the most profitable day’s work, that you ever performed in your life. That God may endow you with a double portion of his spirit, and eminently bless the union which promises so well in its commencement, is the sincere prayer of

Your affectionate Father.

LETTER VII.

MY DEAR E.

IN glancing at the duties of the christian ministry, we may, for the sake of convenience, arrange them under three general heads—viz. *preaching the word*, the *pastoral care*, and those more *public labors* which are called for to promote the general interests of the Redeemer's Kingdom, both at home and abroad.

Among these, *preaching* holds the first place ; and the proof is, that much greater stress is laid by the sacred writers, upon this form of religious instruction than upon any other. I might refer you to a hundred passages such as the following. “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to *preach* the gospel to the poor ; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to *preach* deliverance to the captives and the recovering of sight to the blind.” “From that time, Jesus began to *preach* and to say, Repent : for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” “And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to *preach*. And they departed and went through the towns, *preaching* the gospel and healing everywhere.” The last command of the ascending Saviour to his disciples was, “Go ye into all the world, and *preach* the gospel to every creature.” It was under the first gospel sermon, after the ascension, that three thousand were converted on the day of pentecost. When

the fires of persecution waxed hot in Jerusalem, "They that were scattered abroad, went everywhere *preaching* the word." "Unto me, saith Paul, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should *preach* among the gentiles, the unsearchable riches of Christ." "For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of *preaching* to save them that believe." "How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed, and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a *preacher*? And how shall they *preach* except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that *preach* the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things to come."

Such is the great stress which is laid upon preaching, throughout the New Testament. It is put before and above all the other means of human salvation. Not that other modes of instruction are unimportant, but that preaching is, above everything else, the divinely appointed instrumentality, by which sinners are to be saved. It was under the preaching of the Apostles, that the first christian churches were planted. It was by preaching, that the Gospel was promulgated throughout the Roman empire, in the first and second centuries. It was by preaching, that the glorious reformation was introduced and carried forward in the sixteenth century; and it is by preaching, that the whole world is to be evangelized. Very much depends upon the faithful discharge of pastoral duties, as I shall have occasion to show in a future

letter, but nothing can be made a substitute for preaching, or demand an equal amount of study and labor.

“It is impossible,” says a writer in the *Eclectic Review*, which has just fallen under my notice, “it is impossible to overrate the importance of preaching; he is no friend to the church or the world, who impairs its sanctity, or diminishes the respect in which it is held. We have often been astonished and distressed at exhortations to the youthful preacher, to remember, that preaching is not the most important part of his office, and that he may do more good out of, than in the pulpit. Surely this is to be wise above what is written in this particular case, and to teach a principle of dangerous application in all cases, namely, that what the Bible says nothing about, in relation to any office, may be more important, than that about which it says all it has to say.”

The terms *preaching* and to *preach*, require very little, if any explanation. Preaching is a public religious discourse. It may be written, or unwritten. It may be read, or delivered from memory, or poured forth extemporaneously, from a full heart and a well disciplined mind. In either case, if it is a public religious discourse, it is *preaching*. To *preach*, in the modern sense of the term, is to deliver a discourse from some text of Scripture, selected for the occasion. In primitive times, it was to discourse more freely and discursively, upon the great doctrines and duties of Christianity.

As your first and great business is to preach the gospel, you will naturally wish to settle it in your

mind, as early as you can, how *much* and how *often* it is your duty to preach. You cannot be always in the pulpit, or the lecture-room. Other duties will demand a part of your time; and if they did not, your strength would soon be exhausted. There are limits beyond which no man can go, although some can go much farther than others. You ask me whether you ought to preach more than *twice* on the sabbath, and to give you some advice about your weekly lectures. You are too well acquainted with my principles and habits, to expect any overweening indulgence here. You are bound to do what you can, and what the best good of your church and congregation requires. It is not a *task*, but a *privilege*, to spend and be spent in the work, to which your Master has called you. But before I answer your questions, allow me to narrow them down by some general remarks.

The first is, that no rule can be given, which will apply at all times and in all cases. It is undoubtedly a minister's duty to preach oftener, during the time of a powerful revival among his people, than when there is no special call for extra-labors. So when the spirit is poured out upon neighboring churches, it may be his duty to preach day after day for his brethren. This is much better, than to call in the aid of evangelists. It is obvious, too, that some preachers are able to do much more than others; and that the same preacher can do more at one time, than at another. It is also manifest, that an evangelist, or a circuit rider, or a missionary travelling from place to place, can *preach* much oftener than a settled pastor,

who has new discourses to prepare from week to week, as he goes along. It is not the effort of speaking, but the mental labor in the study, which makes the face pale and wears out the strength. Almost any minister, of ordinary health, who would find it impossible to settle down and bring out two good discourses in a week, might preach every day, if that were all he had to do, and if by going from town to town, he could repeat the same sermon a hundred times over.

The general rule for a settled pastor, I take to be this—to preach as often as his health, and a due regard to his preparation, and other duties will permit ; and as the good of his people requires. His ability may not always be adequate to their wants, on the one hand, or he may be able to preach more than would be profitable to them, on the other. But it cannot be supposed, that there will ordinarily be any essential difference, between the demand for religious instruction, and the ability to give it. He who ordained the christian ministry, and gives his servants a certain degree of strength to labor, does not at the same time create reasonable demands on the part of their congregations, which it is impossible for them to meet. If the conversion of sinners and the edification of the church required four or five public discourses on the sabbath, and preaching every other day in the week, God would doubtless have given his ministers strength, both of body and mind, to meet the demand ; for under the wise and equitable laws of his kingdom, one thing is always set over against another. Let any man tell me, how many well di-

gested discourses a minister of fair average health and talents can ordinarily preach, without encroaching upon his other duties, and I will tell you how many it is ordinarily profitable for his people to hear. Or on the other hand, tell me how many they need, and I will tell you about how many he can preach.

I am now prepared to answer your first question, "Ought I, in the regular discharge of my ministerial duties, to preach more than *twice* on the sabbath?" No, my son, I cannot advise you to do it; and on this point I speak from a good deal of experience and observation. As you are in the prime of life, and have a good constitution, and a pretty thorough theological education, I do not doubt that you might for a few months, or even longer, preach *three* times, to the edification of your hearers, and without any great personal exposure. You have not, however, entered the ministry for a few months, but for life; and it should be an object with you, to husband your strength so as to live and preach as many years as you can. You ought, by no means, to begin on a higher key, than you have reason to think you can hold out; for by so doing, you will create demands and expectations, which it may cost you your life to meet. Even if I thought you would be able to deliver three good discourses every Lord's day, after three or five years' experience in the ministry, I would, by no means, advise you to begin with more than two. But I do not think you ever will. I do not believe, that one pastor in a hundred can do it, year after year, without serious injury to his health; and I will add, to his *usefulness* also. The undermining

process may be slow, and for a long time imperceptible, and yet health be sacrificed and life shortened.

When I say, that in my judgment, it would be unsafe for you to preach more than twice a sabbath, I include the labor of careful preparation. Undoubtedly, with your training, you might take your texts and deliver three such discourses as are often heard from the pulpit, without much more draft upon your strength, than the bare fatigue of speaking so many hours; but they would not be such sermons as I wish you to preach, or as it would be profitable for your people to hear. What they want, I mean, what they ought to have in a sermon, is not words, but thought; clear, condensed and consecutive thought—a discourse which has cost the preacher many hours of hard study, and which has a beginning, a middle and an end. More than two such, you cannot prepare, from sabbath to sabbath, whether written or unwritten; and of course, you cannot preach but twice. There will be exceptions, as I have already intimated. Now and then, where there seems to be a special call for it, a third sermon may be added. So a minister may preach three times abroad with less fatigue, than it would cost him to preach twice at home. In like manner, when God pours out his spirit, and sinners are asking what they must do to be saved, that must be a slothful servant indeed, who will not increase his labors, at almost any exposure. But these are the exceptions, and not the general rule.

The plea which I have oftenest heard urged, for a third public service on the Lord's day, is, that other denominations will open their houses and draw off

the people ; and that there is no other way to maintain your own ground, but to “ out-preach and out-pray them.” If by *out-preaching* them is meant, that you must preach as often, or oftener than they do, are you sure of doing it, by adding a third sermon on sabbath evening ? What if those, with whom you thus feel obliged to enter into competition, should choose to come and preach under the windows of your church every day in the week ? Could you out-preach them ? Could you keep up with them ? No, my son. You might break down your health. You might sacrifice your life in this unprofitable, if not unholy emulation ; but how could you expect to succeed where, as is commonly the case, these noisy itinerant “troublers of Israel,” take no time for preparation, and where, as soon as one pair of lungs is worn out, another is ready to take up and prolong the sound ? A settled pastor, who thinks it his duty to “ feed the people with knowledge and understanding,” cannot count discourses, with those who have “ no certain dwelling place,” but who come to “ beat the air,” for a few days, and then give way to others ; and it is idle to attempt it.

But does the preacher, who regularly exhausts himself with a third service, to keep his people from running after “ new lights,” reason correctly ? Is he more likely to hold his congregation together, by preaching a great many *indifferent* sermons, than by preaching a less number of *good* ones ? Does everything depend upon the *quantity*, and nothing on the *quality* ? A minister who has been in the habit of instructing his people with well studied discourses,

gives them much less credit for discrimination than they deserve, if he supposes they will not see the difference, between such sermons, and the most impassioned empty harangues. Some who have "itching ears," may be drawn aside and "wander" after the new sect or preacher, for a time ; but let the pastor hold on the even tenor of his way, preaching with zeal and power as many sermons as he can well prepare, and nearly all who have wandered will presently return, and be more attached to him than ever. My own opportunities for observation on this point have not been very limited ; and I do not recollect ever to have known a minister lose the confidence of his flock, and see them scattered from him, because he spent so much labor on two sermons for the sabbath, that he had neither time to make, nor strength to deliver another. But it would be easy on the other hand, to refer to cases, where pastors have both ruined their health and lost the esteem of their congregations, by attempting too much in the way of self-defence, by adding to the *number* of their public discourses and diminishing the *weight*. He is the preacher to grow and wear well, to have a full house and an attentive audience, and to pass safely through every storm, who brings out two well-wrought discourses a week, and attempts no more, in the ordinary course of his ministry. Some few may be able to add a third, for the evening of the Lord's day, but they are the exceptions. The great body of pastors cannot safely preach more than twice.

The next question is, can a congregation ordinarily hear and well digest more than *two* public discourses

in one day? As the only object of preaching is the benefit of the hearers, if two are enough for them, why should a third be required? Here I expect to be set down, and by some of your own excellent friends and supporters, perhaps, as quite behind the times. This is a bustling and *hearing*, rather than a *thinking* age. I question whether there was ever a more restless running after sermons, than there has been in this country, for the last twenty years. To hear, hear, hear, seems to be the all important concern, in the estimation of one half the christians in the land. Multitudes would be glad to hear three or four discourses, every sabbath in the year, and as many more on the intervening days of the week. But is this a healthy appetite for “the sincere milk of the word,” or is it a morbid craving for excitement, which leaves the soul as empty as Pharaoh’s lean kine, after they had eaten up the seven fat ones? I have no hesitation in giving it as my deliberate opinion, that demanding and hearing too many sermons, is one of the prominent *religious* faults of the present age. A moderate meal of substantial food strengthens the body more than would thrice the quantity of any kind, which money could purchase, or the culinary art serve up.

The two sermons, which a preacher of correct views and respectable talents brings forward on the sabbath, as the product of his week’s labor, not only contain a good deal of important instruction, but afford matter for serious meditation, self-application and prayer; I am perfectly satisfied, that nine out of ten of your church and congregation may derive

more advantage by staying at home after the second service, and making the most of what they have heard, than they could by going out to hear a third sermon, of even the highest order. On this subject, there has been a very great change in the views and habits of American christians, within my own remembrance. Formerly, it was the custom of religious parents, to carry as much of the two sermons home with them as they could, and to spend a part, at least, of every sabbath evening in questioning their children about what they had heard, and in this way, fixing as much of the truth as possible in their minds. I often ask myself, will those days of meditation and family instruction ever return? Till they return, it may be best, perhaps, to hold meetings for prayer and religious conference on sabbath evenings, to be conducted chiefly, if not exclusively, by the officers and brethren of the church.

The question how many lectures, if any, you ought ordinarily to preach on week days, need not detain us long. No definite rule, so far as I know, can be given. That there should be preaching, in every congregation, "out of season, as well as in season," I am fully convinced. The interval is too long, between sabbath and sabbath. And there are likely to be considerable numbers of persons, nominally belonging to your charge, whom you can never reach, unless you carry the gospel nearer to them, than your place of public worship, and in a form somewhat more colloquial than comports with the dignity of the pulpit.

I hope, my son, that you will have health and

strength to preach once, at least, near the middle of the week, for your own advantage, as well as that of your people. Sometimes you may omit this service, when there is no special interest, or when other duties press hard ; while, on the other hand, it may often be your duty to preach more than once, in different neighborhoods. But as I shall have occasion to recur to this topic, when I come to speak of revivals, I will not enlarge at present. May he who has called you to the ministry, give you grace and strength to preach as often and as faithfully, as the spiritual interests of your church and congregation require.

I am affectionately, &c.

LETTER VIII.

MY DEAR E.

MY last letter was taken up with such advice and remarks as occurred to me, respecting the amount of labor, which as a *preacher* you ought to undertake, especially on the Lord's day. As it is a matter of vastly greater importance *how* and *what* you preach, than *how often*, I shall now proceed, in compliance with your wishes, to this main branch of the subject. Perhaps, as you have enjoyed such excellent opportunities for instruction on this topic in the seminary, I might be excused for passing it over with a few very general remarks. But the love I bear you, and the hope that my own experience may enable me to suggest some thoughts which will be for your advantage, prompt me to proceed in a more minute and methodical way. I write with all the confidence and familiarity of a father to a son, who, I know, will give more heed to my suggestions, than could reasonably be expected from a stranger. Preaching, in order to answer its great and good design, must embrace all the fundamental doctrines of the gospel. You are not at liberty to select such topics as you think will please your hearers best, and leave out those which are most obnoxious to men of "perverse and reprobate minds." This would be setting up your own judgment above the authority of the Bible. Remem-

ber, my son, that you are not the *law-maker*, but merely the *expounder*. You are not answerable for what the scriptures teach, but for your own fidelity in "declaring all the counsel of God." I can testify from experience, how trying it is, to preach doctrines which are unpopular, and which you know some of your best personal friends, and most influential parishioners dislike to hear. But you have no more right to with-hold any clearly revealed Bible truth, on this account, than a Commissioner, sent by an earthly potentate to propose terms of pardon to a rebellious province, would have, to alter or leave out some of the essential conditions, for fear of further exasperating the rebels. What has the minister to do with the conditions, but to state them fully, as the only ground on which his Master will be reconciled to those whom he finds in a state of rebellion? Should any of your church or congregation complain under your preaching, "These are hard sayings who can hear them?"—as it is more than possible they may, let your answer be, "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." "Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." If you were to preach most of the doctrines of the gospel ever so faithfully and ably, and to pass over others, because they are mysterious, or because they are unpopular; or if you were to preach all but *one* of them with the zeal and power of an Apostle, and purposely leave

out that one from fear or favor, you would not be a "good and faithful servant." A preacher has no more right to "keep back" one clearly revealed truth, than he has another—than he has two or three or any greater number. The system of divine truth, contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is one connected whole. Nothing can be taken from it, as nothing can be added to it, without destroying its symmetry, and marring its beauty. I do not say, that the preaching and belief of every doctrine is equally essential to salvation; because some doctrines are made much more prominent than others in the Bible; but all are important, or they would not have been revealed; and the preacher who should omit but one, on account of its being peculiarly obnoxious to a portion of his hearers, would be quite as likely to leave out the key-stone of the arch, as any other.

The first duty, then, for him who aspires to the office of a religious teacher is, to take the scriptures, and by careful study, accompanied with fervent prayer, to ascertain what "the Holy Ghost teacheth." This done, he has a perfectly plain path before him—a path marked out by "the finger of God" himself, and let him not turn to the right hand nor to the left. I am sure you will not, my son, as some others do, first determine with yourself, what a divine revelation *ought* to contain, and then make it bend to your wishes; but go to the Bible to learn what it *does* contain, with a fixed resolution to bring out the whole truth according to your best understanding and ability. I do not mean, that you are bound to preach

upon every important and striking text, from Genesis to Revelation. That would be more than the work of the longest life. What I do mean, I hope has been stated with sufficient clearness already. Keep back nothing, explain away nothing, modify nothing, conceal nothing;—but just declare all the counsel of God, and leave it with him, whose prerogative it is, to make his own word “quick, powerful, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit, of the joints and the marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

I repeat it, preach all the doctrines of grace clearly and earnestly, whether your people “will hear or whether they will forbear.” Some may be offended and go away, and walk no more with you. And what if *all* should be offended, and drive you from your post for your fidelity, would the fear or even the certainty of such a result, excuse you for keeping back any part of the truth? Has Christ anywhere set his ministers such an example? Did the Apostles and other primitive preachers ever adopt this man-pleasing, time-serving policy? Did they not on the contrary, voluntarily expose themselves to persecution and death, by their inflexible and uncompromising adherence to the letter and spirit of their divine commission? The holy martyrs of the two first centuries, how many of them might have saved their lives, by promising to “speak no more in the name of Jesus;” but did they hesitate between duty and the fagots—between the commands of their Master and the terrors of a violent and frightful death? Did Luther

refrain from denouncing the corruptions of popery, because the thunders of the Vatican threatened to smite him, as an apostate who had sinned beyond forgiveness? No. "I would go to Worms, if I knew there were as many devils there, as there are tiles on the houses." This, as you know was the spirit of that illustrious Reformer. And every servant of Christ in the ministry ought to preach the *whole* truth, though it should empty his church, or consign him to beggary. Who would not rather descend to the lowest menial service, with a good conscience, and toil for a crust, under the approving smiles of his Master, than to remain pastor of the most popular church in the land, by the forfeiture of his allegiance?

But what class of ministers, in point of fact, have the largest congregations, and enjoy the highest confidence of their people, and are least liable to be driven from their pulpits? If it is those who are most accommodating or indefinite in their preaching, then my observation and enquiries have deceived me. I believe it will be found, on the contrary, with very few exceptions, that other things being equal, those pastors enjoy altogether the most encouraging and desirable popularity, who preach what are called the *hard* doctrines just as they stand in the Bible. At all events, they do the most good; for they use not a part, but all the means which God has appointed, to bring sinners to the knowledge of the truth, and "to edify the body of Christ." Nothing can be more unsafe, may I not add, nothing can be more criminal, than to substitute our short-sighted wisdom and pru-

dence for "the wisdom of God in a mystery." Those very "weapons of our warfare" against the powers of darkness, which the world would persuade us to throw aside as wholly unfit for use, are often found to be the "mightiest through God, to the pulling down of strong holds." "Thou, therefore, my son, endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Be faithful unto death, and he will give thee a crown of life."

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER IX.

MY DEAR E.

YOU must have felt, in reading over my last letter, that it bears heavily upon those ministers, if there be any, and I think there are some, who try to atone for the deficiency of their *preaching*, by the orthodoxy of their *creed*. When they are examined for ordination, they unhesitatingly avow their belief in all the evangelical doctrines ; and wish to have it understood by their people, that they are as sound in the faith, as any of their brethren. But you may sit under their preaching for years together, without ever hearing a discourse upon any of the more difficult and controverted points. They seem to be afraid to grapple with them. The most you can expect from a preacher of this class is, that he will now and then glance at the more abstruse articles of his own creed and the creed of his church, by the way of inference towards the close of a sermon. He deems it inexpedient and unprofitable, to bring them into the pulpit in the way of free and full discussion ; and the first consequence is, that his people are led seriously to doubt, whether he himself more than half believes them ; for if he did, they argue, he would feel himself bound to make them more prominent in his public ministrations. The next consequence of this omission is, that the congregation and not a few members of the church, are gradually prepared to reject, first one and then

another of the prominent doctrines contained in their own confession. It is not necessary to preach *against* any doctrine to undermine it. Only keep it out of sight, and it will fall as a matter of course. It was not by preaching against the Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, man's total depravity, the necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and the like, that these fundamental doctrines of our puritan fathers were ultimately thrown out of so many of the churches which they planted. It was by *letting them alone*, by leaving the congregations to forget them, or to regard them as antiquated and unimportant, if not absolutely erroneous. And the same thing will happen uniformly, where a similar course is pursued. Doctrines must be preached, or they cannot be retained—those in particular which exalt God and humble the pride of man. No matter how scriptural and evangelical the articles of any church may be. Let the pastor of that church omit to explain, prove and enforce them, for a quarter of a century, and they will cease to be believed by the great body of his hearers. He cannot after that preach them if he would. They will not be endured. It is idle, therefore, for a minister, however correct his own speculative opinions may be, to think that they can be perpetuated, without being preached. Omitting to bring them forward in their proper place is, to all practical purposes, the same thing as giving them up.

But as I have laid so much stress upon doctrinal preaching, you will ask perhaps, whether, if some ministers have been deficient in this part of their duty, others have not gone into the opposite extreme,

and dwelt upon the more abstruse and controverted doctrines too much? I frankly answer, that I think they have. This seems to me to have been the fault of some very able and pious divines of the last age. They gave too much ground for cavillers to say, that they could think and preach of nothing else but depravity, divine sovereignty, election, regeneration and other kindred topics, and there may be here and there a preacher still who dwells too much, rather than too little, upon these doctrines. But I am free to express it as my opinion, that where one errs on this hand, five may be found, who err more or less on the other. The present is not so much an age of fundamental principles and calm discussion, as of *action*, and aiming at immediate *results*. I wish you, my son, to be more thoroughly doctrinal in your preaching than most young ministers of the present day are. But I hope to convince you before I am through, that I lay as great stress as you could wish, upon practical preaching also.

There are several ways in which the doctrines may be brought into the pulpit; and with regard to these, as well as to the proper times and seasons, "wisdom is profitable to direct." Sometimes, as when the opposite errors prevail and are gaining ground, it is necessary to adopt the style, (not the bitter spirit,) but the style of controversy. The enemy is at the gates, and you must meet him hand to hand. There is no other way. When truths which you believe to be fundamental are assailed, you are bound, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, openly and manfully to defend them. When "damnable heresies" are brought in,

or when error in any form is obtruded upon your people, and efforts are made to turn them away from the "faith once delivered to the saints,"—if this should ever happen, it will be your duty to dispute every inch of ground with "the sword of the spirit," which has so often "turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Whether they who trouble you be the open and avowed enemies of the gospel, or wolves in sheep's clothing, you must keep them out of the fold if you can. Whatever popular errors may be promulgated, you must take them up one by one, and show their falsity by bringing them to the test of Scripture. You must convince your hearers by arguments drawn from the word of God, that their faith, however artfully it may be assailed, stands "not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." This is *controversial* preaching. Under such circumstances it is called for. It cannot be avoided without giving up the truth.

Some excellent preachers and defenders of the faith, it appears to me however, unnecessarily expose their own positions by going abroad as it were, in quest of the enemy, when they should be strengthening themselves within their own entrenchments. They read of some heresy, new or old, which is springing up and gaining proselytes a thousand miles off, but which not one in twenty of their congregation knows anything about, and for fear that it will ere long be brought in by somebody, and spread among the people, they introduce it into the pulpit, tell every body what it is, warn every body against it, and in this way excite a fatal curiosity in unsta-

ble minds, which, but for the pastor's zeal to guard them against error, might have always remained in happy ignorance of it.

If you ask me what course I would advise you to pursue in such cases, I will tell you what I have always done, and it has worked well. When, from my watch-tower, I have descried the enemy at a distance, but threatening no immediate danger, I have gone quietly to work on that side, without sounding the alarm, and fortified against him. In this way I have endeavored to make my defences too strong for him, if he should ever come. Or to speak without a figure, I have always tried to keep myself informed with regard to the existence and progress of erroneous doctrines, wherever they might prevail, and to meet them, not by heralding their coming, but by preaching the opposite truth and thus preparing my hearers to reject them at once. If the blasphemies of such infidels as Voltaire and Paine, or Abner Kneeland, should ever become rife where you are stationed, you must rebuke them fearlessly in the name of the Lord. So if those who "deny the Lord that bought them," or reject the doctrine of future punishments, or aspire to "something newer" in the mystical vagaries of a transcendental gospel, or the atheistical dreams of pantheism, should seek within the circle of your influence to "draw away disciples after them," it would undoubtedly be your duty to withstand them face to face. But I hardly know how a minister could be more unprofitably, I was going to say *worse* employed, than, for the sake of showing his zeal or his skill in controversy, in collecting and retailing

infidel objections and erroneous expositions of the Bible to his people, which, had he been silent, they never would have heard of. You know the adage, that it is easier to raise the evil spirit than to lay him. There is always danger, considering the wrong biases of the human heart, that the objections will be remembered, after the answers are forgotten. If the objections come, meet them in the threshold and scatter them ; but if they will stay away, never bring them in yourself, nor say anything which may move your people to go out and invite them. The best way to keep out error is, to pre-occupy the minds of your hearers with the truth.

But although doctrinal preaching ought not, in my judgment, to be *controversial*, except where the truth is directly assailed, I am equally well satisfied, that all the important doctrines ought to be brought forward and fully discussed from appropriate texts of scripture, by every minister of Christ. Is it the entire depravity of the human heart that he wishes to prove, let him select a passage which asserts the fact, as Rom. 8 : 7. "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Is it regeneration by the Holy Spirit, or the doctrine of the Trinity, or the Divinity of Christ, or faith, or repentance, let him do likewise. The doctrines of Christianity are its fundamental principles, which ought from time to time to be clearly stated, each by itself, and substantiated by appropriate arguments. This may be done without assailing or answering anybody ; and I can-

not think that any preacher does his duty, who is not in this sense a doctrinal preacher.

Another way of preaching the doctrines, is to bring them forward, in their scriptural relations and harmony. This is called *systematic* preaching. Dr. Griffin's Park Street Lectures are a very good example of it; and it has some important advantages. I would not advise you to proceed in this respect, just as you would, if you were a theological professor in Andover, or Princeton. Perhaps it may not be expedient for you to go through with a regular system of divinity before your people, and perhaps it may be, with such alternations and interruptions as the state of your church and congregation may require. But at any rate, I would strongly recommend that you attempt something of the kind. The doctrines of the Bible illustrate and support each other. If you cannot find time for a regular course, take up one part of the system at one time, and after a suitable interval take up another, and so proceed as you find it most profitable and convenient. You will derive great advantage from it yourself, while your congregation will be more interested and confirmed in the truth than they could be in any other way. I verily believe that one great reason, why many serious minded persons look with so much dread and suspicion at some of the Calvinistic doctrines, is, they contemplate them as standing out, each by itself, in stern and lonely repulsiveness;—whereas, if they had been taught to view these same doctrines in their proper harmony, according to the analogy of faith, they would have seen their consistency and embraced them.

There is still another method of doctrinal preaching, which is recommended by some peculiar advantages, although, as I have intimated in another place, I should regard any preacher as exceedingly deficient in his duty, if he were to rely upon it *exclusively*. I allude to that class of discourses, in which controverted and offensive doctrines are brought out inferentially and unexpectedly. The hearer is led along, step by step, in a plain path, assenting to the truth of every proposition, because it agrees with his creed, or because it is so clear that he cannot help it, till the preacher draws an inference which he was not looking for, and which presents some doctrine that he had been accustomed to deny, in an entirely new light. He is startled. He cannot believe it, and yet upon a careful review of the premises, he does not see how it is possible to get rid of it. He sees it, almost in spite of himself, to be a legitimate, logical deduction. In many cases this produces conviction, where apparently nothing else could. I have no hesitation in saying, that all the hard doctrines may be inferred from premises, in which almost all sects of evangelical christians are agreed; and he who is skillful in eliciting these doctrines wields a most important weapon in defence of the truth.

If you ask me, whether I would have you make each of the doctrines equally prominent in your preaching, or how, if you ought to dwell more upon some than others, you can ascertain the right proportion, I refer you to the Bible, for the safest and best answer that can be given. Carefully note the space which the doctrines respectively occupy, in

the scriptures. Mark the comparative stress which is laid upon them by the sacred writers, and let this be your guide. Try to make each one just as prominent as the Holy Ghost has made it, and no more so. By following this rule, you will dwell much more upon depravity, the atonement, regeneration, faith and repentance, than upon free agency and divine efficiency, or natural and moral ability ; but I hope you will carefully bear it in mind, that the latter are just as much entitled to their due proportion of regard as the former. The more you study the scriptures, with fervent prayer to God for the teaching of his Spirit, the more likely you will be “rightly to divide the word of truth, and to give to every one his portion in due season.” If you should find some of the controverted doctrines made more prominent by the sacred writers, than you had once supposed, you need not give yourself a moment’s anxiety about the effect of preaching them distinctly and earnestly ; for God will take care of his own truth, and make it “accomplish the thing whereto he sent it.”

The only additional remark I have to make with regard to doctrinal preaching is, that it ought to be *judiciously timed*, and clothed in as acceptable language as is consistent with a clear exhibition of the truth. “Words fitly spoken are like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” No person was ever convinced of the truth of a mathematical demonstration, by being knocked on the head for not seeing it. It will be perfectly clear to any preacher who “discerns the signs of the times,” and is acquainted with the state of his flock, that some seasons are more favorable

than others, for the discussion of difficult or unacceptable topics ; the great thing is, to seize upon and improve the golden opportunity. In many cases, perhaps in most, the way may be gradually prepared by a judicious preacher for the presentation and acceptance of truths, which many might otherwise have wrested to their own destruction. That you, my dear son, may have all needed wisdom and grace imparted to you, to "preach the preaching which God hath bidden you," is the earnest prayer of your
Affectionate Father.

LETTER X.

MY DEAR E.

I hope you will not infer from my having dwelt so long upon doctrinal preaching in my two last letters, that I attach any the less importance to *practical* preaching. Indeed, when rightly understood and presented, all the doctrines of the gospel, like all the principles of natural science, are highly practical; and it is on this account, that they ought to be frequently brought into every pulpit, and thoroughly studied by every congregation. If the doctrines of the christian religion were mere barren abstractions, however interesting the study of them might be to men of philosophic minds, there could be no possible advantage in preaching them. It is because they have a direct bearing upon the immortal interests of man, that they were put into our sacred commission; and if we keep them back, it is at our peril. This is true of the most mysterious doctrines of the Bible, such as the Omnipresence of God, the Trinity in Unity, man's free agency and absolute dependence, and that great "mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." Should any person deny that these doctrines are practical, I would simply ask him to reflect a moment and then answer me. Is it of no practical importance whether men believe that God is every

where present, "searching the heart and trying the reins, to render unto every one according as his work shall be?" Is it of no practical importance to believe, that God exists in three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; that the Father sent the Son into the world to seek and to save that which was lost; that in him the divine and human natures were mysteriously united, so that there might be man to bleed, and Divinity to atone? Is it of no practical importance to be taught and to believe, that we are perfectly free and accountable moral agents on the one hand, and on the other, that "we are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but that all our sufficiency is of God." The truth is, that in some sense every thing in the Bible is practical. From beginning to end it is a practical book; so that whoever preaches the doctrines and applies them as its divine Author intended, is a practical preacher.

But there are classes of truths, which, though founded upon the doctrines or growing out of them, are commonly called *practical*, on account of their more obvious and immediate bearing upon our duties and our destiny. Such are the ten commandments; the beatitudes in our Lord's sermon on the mount, and the warnings, threatenings, invitations and promises, which abound throughout the Old Testament and the New. All these, and whatever other great practical truths you find in the Bible, I would have you preach distinctly, earnestly, faithfully. The law and the gospel comprehend all the duties which we

owe to God and to our fellow men. I would advise you, therefore, as soon as you can, to take up the decalogue in a series of discourses, more or less extended according to circumstances, so as to be sure that you touch upon all the requirements and prohibitions of the ten commandments, in the early part of your ministry. You will find it an exceedingly fruitful and interesting field, and when once you have fairly entered it, I have no doubt your congregation will be anxious to have you go over the whole ground. If you make thorough work of it, it will do you more good than a whole year in the best Theological Seminary, and lay a broad foundation for future success in your labors. It may cost you more hard study than to preach on various familiar topics, from isolated texts of Scripture; but it will be all the better for that, provided you have health to sustain it. In entering upon such a course of sermons, you will have a fine opportunity to hold up the law of God before your people, in all its strictness and spirituality; to insist upon the reasonableness of its claims, the justice of its penalty and the impossibility of being justified by it. Let me exhort you, in preaching upon the law of God as laid down in the ten commandments, to be very explicit in pointing out the difference between the *letter* and the *spirit*. Show your hearers, that outward obedience however exact, is nothing, without the heart; that no external act of worship or relative duty is rightly performed, unless it springs from love to God and love to man. This is the only right way of preaching the moral law. In this way, and in this way only, can it be

made to bear in a direct and practical manner upon the heart and the conscience.

I know very well, that some persons cannot endure what they are pleased to stigmatise as "legal preaching," any more than they can bear sound doctrine." But what is *legal* preaching in the proper sense of the term? If you were to hold up perfect obedience to the moral law, as the ground of justification before God, and to tell your hearers, they can be saved by their own works, that would be *legal* preaching with a witness. But still, some will tell you that they do not want the law, but the gospel. They are mistaken. They "know not what they ask." They *do* want the law, "as a school-master to bring them to Christ." Preaching the law in its length and breadth—in its deep and searching spirituality, prepares the way for the gospel. "The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." The sinner must first be convinced, that if he lingers about Mount Sinai, the lightning may at any moment strike him dead, and then he will be glad to have you tell him the way to Calvary, but not before. I do not say that in preaching the law, you are bound to take all your texts from the twentieth chapter of Exodus. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law, to do them," and other appropriate passages will do just as well. Nor do I say, that you are bound to begin your ministry with the law, and to say nothing about the gospel, till you have gone over all the ten commandments. Far from it. What I mean is this, and I hope I have made it sufficiently clear already, that

the law is to be preached as well as the gospel, and that a right view of its claims and sanctions is essential to the acceptance of the Gospel.

But here, you say, some one will ask, "Did not the Apostle Paul determine to know nothing among the Corinthians, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. And how, in consistency with this noble resolution, can any minister dwell so much in his preaching as I have recommended you to dwell, upon the law." To meet this objection fairly, we must ascertain, if we can, what and how much the Apostle meant by preaching Jesus Christ and him crucified. To understand him aright, we must take this verse in connection with that which immediately precedes it. "And I brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified." Dr. Scott's Commentary on this passage is so judicious and satisfactory to my own mind, that I cannot deny myself the pleasure of quoting it.

"When the Apostle came, a Jewish stranger, among the polite, speculating and licentious Corinthians, he did not attempt to catch their attention, by affected elegance or sublimity of language, by the trappings of human oratory, or by the speculations of philosophy. For his object was to declare the testimony of God, concerning the only method of salvation from eternal misery and of obtaining eternal life; and such a message would not admit of these worthless embellishments. Whatever knowledge, therefore,

he possessed, whether of Rabbinical or Grecian learning, he determined to keep it out of sight, and to preach as if he had known no other subject than that of Jesus the Messiah, even him who was crucified and who was generally despised and execrated, and those things that related to the redemption of sinners through his blood. This was the center and substance of his preaching; but it is evident, that he did not confine himself wholly to this one topic, so as to exclude other parts of the revealed will and truth of God: for we are sure from his own writings, that he preached man's relation to God as his Creator, Benefactor and Governor; the glorious perfections and the holy law of God; the future judgment and eternal state of righteous retributions; the lost estate of man, regeneration, repentance, conversion, the necessity of personal holiness, attention to relative duties, and in short, the whole counsel of God, as the great circumference to that circle, of which Christ crucified is the centre in which all the lines meet. But upon the most mature deliberation, he determined to know nothing, even among the refined and philosophical Corinthians, which did not elucidate, recommend, evince, or adorn this great doctrine of salvation by the cross of Christ."

This admirable exposition lays open the mistake of those, who think they have "fully preached the Gospel of Christ," when they have rung as many changes as they can upon a few phrases which relate to his sufferings, death and atonement; and it shows, that as "the field is the world," so the whole system of divine truth is the gospel, or is so essentially connected

with it, that the gospel cannot be said to be fully and faithfully preached, where any Bible doctrine or precept is kept out of sight. No one, I believe, will deny, that all the warnings and denunciations of the New Testament, as well as its great and precious promises, belong to the gospel. And if, my son, you preach the gospel as Paul preached it, as Peter preached it, those who cannot endure the terrors of the law will be quite as restless under the gospel, just as those who demand practical preaching, writhe under it, when it is brought home to their consciences, more than they ever did under the hardest doctrines.

In truth, you well know, the most awful threatenings in the Bible are found in the New Testament, and many of them were uttered by the Savior himself. "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" "And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out; it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." "Then shall he say to them on his left hand, depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." "For if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." These alarming denunciations you must utter, as well as the invitations of the gospel, if you would be a good and faithful minister of Christ.

You may be reproached for it by some whom you would gladly please, if you could. You may be denounced as unfeeling, as uncharitable, as equally destitute of refinement and correct taste. You may be told that you entirely miss your aim; that nobody was ever frightened to heaven or ever will be, and much more to the same effect. But let Paul answer for you. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." Let Jude speak to the same point. "And others save with fear, plucking them out of the fire." Remember, my dear son, in every sermon you preach, whether doctrinal or practical, whether alarming or inviting, that "it is a very small thing to be judged of man's judgment, for he that judgeth you is the Lord."

I must add, that your preaching ought to be highly *experimental*, as well as doctrinal and practical. Such is the unspeakable deceitfulness of the human heart, and so much reason is there to fear, that many in the church are deceived, that professors of religion everywhere need not only to be exhorted to "examine themselves, whether they be in the faith," but to have the dangers of self-deception often and clearly pointed out from the pulpit, by those who watch for their souls. I apprehend, there is a great deficiency on this head, in many pulpits throughout our land. It is, I greatly fear, too readily taken for granted, by some ministers of undoubted piety, that nearly all who come into the visible church are truly converted to God. Unquestionably there are many false professors—many who will say, "We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets, to

whom Christ will answer, "I know you not whence ye are ; depart from me all ye workers of iniquity." And even if this were not the case, true christians need line upon line in regard to the nature and fruits of true religion, to assist them in the all important duty of self-examination. Every church needs the most searching experimental sermons, that a faithful pastor can preach, not at long intervals, but frequently ; that hypocrites may find no hiding place in their delusions, and that sincere christians may be led to pray with the Psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart ; try me and know my thoughts ; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." I hope, my son, you will study this subject deeply and with much prayer, that you may be able to point out the difference between true and false religion somewhat after the manner of the "Almost Christian," "True Religion Delineated," by Dr. Bellamy, and the "Religious Affections," by President Edwards ; and to point it out so clearly, that none but the wilfully blind can help seeing it. In this way, peradventure, some may be brought to renounce their false hopes and begin anew. But if not, if they should still cling to them and perish, you will "deliver your own soul."

Very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XI.

MY DEAR E.

As your stated preaching ought to be both doctrinal and practical, and must be, to make you an eminently useful minister, so its two grand objects should be, the *conversion of sinners*, and the *edification of the church*. The christian ministry was instituted, to “turn men from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God,” first to bring them into the kingdom of Christ, and then to “feed them with knowledge and understanding,” and train them up for heaven. It is hard to tell which stands in most need of preaching, the world or the church. It is, and always has been, under the faithful preaching of the gospel, that sinners are awakened and brought to repentance, and that saints are built up in their most holy faith.

First, then, let me exhort you, my son, to direct your ministerial efforts earnestly to the conversion of sinners. When you look round upon your congregation, and see how many there are, of all classes and ages, who make no pretensions to religion and give no evidence of piety, let “your eye affect your heart.” Think how precious are their immortal souls; what an infinite price has been paid for their ransom, and how certain is their eternal destruction, if they die in their sins. Remember, that till they are convinced of their lost estate, and brought to the foot of the

cross, nothing is done to any saving purpose. However much their minds may be enlightened, or their morals improved under your ministry; however highly they may applaud your preaching, and however much they may be influenced by it in their social and civil relations, till they give their hearts to God, they lie under the curse of his law.

While, therefore, you bear them on your heart continually at the throne of grace, and remember that God alone can make your preaching effectual to their salvation, ask him to direct you in the choice of texts and subjects; study to adapt your discourses to their respective characters and circumstances; try every lawful method to arrest their attention. Preach the terrors of the law and the invitations of the gospel. Lead them now to Sinai, and now to Calvary. Pray them now in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God, and now assure them from his lips, that "except they repent, they shall all perish." Never allow yourself to feel, that things are going on well in your congregation, unless some are asking what they must do to be saved. Never rest satisfied with a year's labor in which many of your people have not been "brought out of darkness into marvellous light." We are strongly tempted, when every thing is quiet in the church and society; when we are sure that we enjoy the affections and confidence of the people; when the house is well filled on the sabbath, and we are listened to with respectful attention—we are strongly tempted, I say, under such circumstances, to congratulate ourselves, that "the lines have fallen to us in pleasant places, and we have

a goodly heritage," although we may be constrained to confess, that no recent additions have been made to the church, and no cases of anxious enquiry have come to our knowledge. But it ought not so to be.

Should few or no conversions take place for a long time under your preaching, however acceptable your labors might be to a united and respectable congregation, it would create the painful presumption, that there must be some want of faithfulness in your ministrations, and might not unnaturally suggest the enquiry, whether some part at least of your popularity should not be put down to that very score. I do not suppose that the exact degree of a minister's fidelity, or skill in dividing the word of truth, can be measured by the number of conversions in his parish, nor even that uncommon success in "winning souls to Christ" is a *certain* evidence of his personal piety. But I think it is an evidence that he preaches the truth. God has so adapted the gospel to the spiritual necessities of his fallen creatures, and has so pledged the aids of his Holy Spirit where it is faithfully dispensed, that the conversion of sinners may be expected with great confidence, unless hindered by some powerful counteracting influence.

Should you then, my dear E., find occasion to complain in the bitterness of your soul, "I have labored in vain and spent my strength for nought and in vain," let it be a matter of serious and prayerful enquiry with you, whether it is not owing to some defect or want of faithfulness in your preaching. One half hour spent upon your knees in your closet may show you perhaps where the fault lies, and sug-

gest the remedy. But though I would on no account have you feel easy, while the great mass of sinners under your charge are going stupidly down to death, I would caution you against yielding to a paralyzing despondency. This is wrong ; and it may put away the blessing to a hopeless distance from a minister, when he was just ready to grasp it. It is your duty to labor on with zeal and untiring energy, in times of the greatest stupidity. Think how long it was, before you yourself could be brought to listen to the gospel. "Line must be upon line, line upon line, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little." "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruits of the earth, and hath long patience, until he receive the early and latter rain." What though you may have "toiled all the night and taken nothing?" Who can tell how soon the Savior may direct you where to "let down the net" and may fill it? But however your faith may be tried, I pray God it may never fail ; and may you never forget, that the first great object of the christian ministry is the conversion of sinners. For this you are to labor, for this you are to pray, as long as you sustain the sacred office.

I come now to the other great end of preaching, viz. the *edification of the church*. It is true there can be no church, no "household of faith," till sinners are converted ; but sinners are converted, not merely to be gathered into the church, and then left to find their way to heaven, as best they may. They are gathered into the church, that they may be "*nourished* up in faith and good doctrine." They

are born again, that they may be “fed with the sincere milk of the word and grow thereby.” All important as the preaching of the gospel is, to bring sinners to Christ, the sacred writers lay quite as much stress upon its being preached to men after their conversion, as before. “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” “Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.” “Feed my sheep—feed my lambs.” “When he (Christ) ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men: some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the edifying the body of Christ.” This is very strong, and so are many other passages. “Take heed, therefore,” says Paul to the elders of Ephesus, “Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over whom the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. And to Timothy, “These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly; but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”

If the Epistles of Paul, Peter, James and John to the primitive churches, are to be taken as fair specimens of the style and burden of their preaching, the importance of this branch of ministerial duty, preaching to christians, is put beyond all dispute: for these letters are filled with the most animated exhortations and cautions, embracing the whole circle of christian duties, graces and affections. I hope, my dear E.,

you will read over these remarkable epistles again and again, with special reference to the point now under consideration. Mark all the texts as you proceed, which are just such as a minister wants in preaching to the church ; observe how they touch upon every conceivable trait of the christian character, and of christian experience, and then count them up, and go back, and spend a few moments in meditating upon each, and tell me if you are not astonished to find how full and various and rich they are. Were I to quote them all, they would fill many sheets. Selections might be made of an exceedingly interesting character : but I have not room even for these.

Now I do not say, that it is your duty to preach upon *all* these texts, the first year, nor the second year of your ministry—it would be impossible. But what I mean to urge upon your most serious consideration thus early, is the prominence which New Testament writers give to this department of ministerial labor ; and I am the more anxious and explicit here, because I think it is not generally appreciated as it ought to be, in the pulpits of this country. Our clergy, of nearly all the denominations, as far as my knowledge and information extends, preach much more to the unconverted, than to professors of religion. I do not believe, that the awakening and alarming truths of God's word are preached so directly and pungently in any other country, as they are in the United States. And this may be one great reason, I think it is, why there are more revivals in America than in any other land. The appropriate means are more generally and faithfully used. Such

being my conviction, you will not understand me to wish the style of American preaching essentially altered in this respect. But I think, if our Lord and Master were to address us from heaven, he would say, "These things ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." There is a marked difference, in our own denomination at least, between the preaching on this side of the Atlantic, and in the pulpits of Great Britain. Our brethren there, as I believe I have remarked in another place, dwell much more than we do, upon the love, character and offices of Christ; upon the blessed influence of the Holy Spirit; upon the beauties of holiness as they shine out in the example of eminent saints; upon the hopes, privileges, and glorious prospects of believers in this world, and upon the blessedness of the heavenly state. Accordingly, their ordinary preaching is, I apprehend, as much better adapted than ours to "edify the body of Christ," as ours is better suited than theirs, to awaken sinners and bring them to repentance. I would not have your style of preaching, my son, exactly American or English in this respect, but let it combine the excellencies of both, or rather, I would have it conformable to the Apostolic standard, and then it will be sure to answer both the two great ends of preaching, the conversion of sinners and the building up of the church.

I am affectionately, &c.

LETTER XII.

MY DEAR E.

IF I have not laid too much stress upon the importance of *preaching*, then it follows, that every minister must take time for prayerful and thorough preparation. *Semper paratus*, can be said of no one, however uncommon his talents, his knowledge of the scriptures, or his theological education.

Whatever gift of tongues, or of prophecy, a few ignorant fanatics may boast of, their rant is as unintelligible to their wondering proselytes, as it is to themselves. But some men who enter the ministry, though they have too much good sense and piety to lay claim to any miraculous assistance in the pulpit, place their chief reliance upon the impulse of the moment, and so neglect their studies. This is not wise. It is not right. It is degrading the sacred office. It is setting a bad example. If it were true that one minister in a hundred could preach as well with little or no premeditation, as by spending the best of his time in preparing his discourses, he would not be justified in thus tempting his less gifted brethren, to throw themselves upon their own feeble and more uncertain impulses. But it is not true. While I freely admit, that here and there one has his happy moments, when upon the spur of the occasion, he can throw off a discourse more warm and brilliant than he could prepare in a whole week in his study,

I wish you to remember, that these *efflatuses*, if I may use such an expression, are few and far between. They do not come over any man in any profession every day, nor every week. And then again, they are entirely uncertain. They acknowledge no human control. They come at no man's bidding. They are subject to no known laws whatsoever, whether physical, or metaphysical. The most ready and eloquent preacher in the land cannot be certain when he goes into the pulpit without conning over his subject and arranging his thoughts, that he shall meet the expectations of his audience, or satisfy himself, however interesting or exciting the occasion may be. The effort may end in what both he and they will pronounce an utter failure. In fact, such failures are extremely common, as well in the pulpit as at the bar and in the senate. I never knew a minister who could preach as well for six months, or one month, without careful preparation, as with. It is one of the laws of our earthly being, that if we would obtain anything valuable to keep ourselves, or to impart to others, we must *labor* for it. This law we cannot alter, and if we could, we should lose incomparably more than we should gain by the alteration. All our faculties are in their nature active, so that labor, whether bodily or mental, is a blessing, as well as a toil.

Such are my views of the manner in which the duties of the sacred profession ought to be discharged, that I do not hesitate to pronounce them more laborious and wasting in a large congregation than those of any other profession. To prepare two

discourses for the sabbath as they ought to be prepared, besides weekly lectures, and at the same time to perform no more than the ordinary amount of pastoral labor, requires a degree of physical energy and mental activity, which I believe no man can duly estimate, till he makes the trial.

You are now a settled pastor. Your post is an important one. Your congregation is large. The sabbaths come round very often. Prepared or not prepared, you must *preach* ; and the advice which I now have to offer, relates to seasonable and thorough preparation.

And here the *first* thing is, to fix as nearly as you can, upon the amount of time which is necessary, and the particular days of the week, or parts of days, which you will devote to it. An arrangement of this sort I hold to be essential, at least for every young preacher. Everything depends upon *system*. It is not too much to say, that almost any man can accomplish twice, or thrice as much with, as without it. I know from my own experience, that the mind works much more cheerfully and with far greater advantage, when the duties of life are so arranged, as to bring every thing into its proper time and place, than by taking one thing after another, as it happens to come up. If you have a fixed time for beginning your sermons, and devote about so many hours each day to them, till they are finished, it will soon grow into a habit. When the time comes, your mind, you can hardly tell how, will be prepared for its work, not as a task but as a pleasure ; and will be uneasy, if you are by any unexpected hindrance kept out of your study.

I know it is impossible for a minister to avoid all interruptions. Your time will be broken in upon more or less, in spite of any arrangements you can make. You must expect some interruptions, and not suffer your equanimity to be at all disturbed by them. But this ought not to discourage you from making the best arrangements you can. I trust you have told your people already, that you must have time to study, and that you have specified the half days when you hope not to be interrupted by calls, except in cases of urgent necessity. If you have, they will recollect it; and instead of making any complaint, will be glad to know that you are preparing to "bring out of your treasure things new and old," for their benefit. But let it be understood by all persons, except the messengers of the sick and strangers, who may happen to call when you are thus engaged, that you cannot consent to be considered as at home; or rather, that you are too exclusively at home, to see any body but your own family, and as little of them as possible.

If you ask me what days you had better take for writing your sermons, I would advise you by all means to begin early in the week; but not on Monday. Ministers, as well as other men, must have a day of rest. The care of their health absolutely demands it; and as they cannot, like other men, rest on the sabbath, they must take another day for it. I recommend *Monday*, because they are then most exhausted by the labors of their sacred calling. Some few preachers begin their sermons on sabbath evening, and pursue their studies with uncommon success,

without giving themselves the relaxation which I have just recommended. And I know from my own experience, that the mind is often clearer and more ready to take up a new subject, under the excitement of two or three public exercises, than at any other time. This excitement might sometimes be kept up with the greatest ease, through the next twenty-four hours, and while it lasts, we feel as if we could do anything and every thing; but it is unsafe. It draws too heavily upon the capital of our strength. However "willing the spirit may be, the flesh is weak." It must have rest, and will take it in spite of us, by ultimate prostration, if it can get it in no other way. Texts and plans often suggest themselves spontaneously after the mental efforts of the sabbath, and may be thought over with more or less advantage as you are abroad taking exercise and relaxation on Monday; but beyond this, I would not advise you to go. Nor would I have you wait longer than Tuesday morning, before you fold your paper, replenish your inkstand, and begin your preparations in earnest. If you put it off till the last of the week, you will not have sufficient time, even under the most favorable circumstances. And then, your time may be taken up by funerals, visiting the sick, or other unavoidable interruptions—or you may be unwell, and thus be obliged either to come before your people quite unprepared, or to task yourself so severely at the last moment, as to be hardly able to preach, and entirely unfitted for the duties of the coming week.

I recommend it to you, by all means to take the *forepart* of the day, rather than the afternoon, or

evening for study, because the mind is clear, more vigorous and elastic in the morning than at any other time; because you are less liable to interruptions, and because you can study more hours and with less exposure of health. I know it is quite *classical* to talk about "trimming the midnight lamp," and if Dr. Johnson were living I might not dare to open my lips against it; but I hope, my son, you will study as little as possible late at night. It is the time when you ought to be asleep. You may easily get the smell of the lamp by sitting up late, and you may impart it to your discourses too, but I think your congregation will like the fresh and fragrant smell of the morning much better. On the subject of studying late at night, I can give you the result of my own dear bought experience. In the early part of my ministry, I used, not very unfrequently, to sit at my table till twelve o'clock, or later, and to keep myself awake with strong coffee. At length my eyes suddenly failed, so that I could not read a page for many months, and it was nearly twenty years before I fully recovered the use of them. It was no doubt a mercy that they gave out when they did, for I can now see that my health was failing, and probably had my eyes remained strong, some vital cord must have snapped soon. I have very rarely studied after ten o'clock in the evening since.

In regard to the time which you ought to spend upon your two sermons, no very definite rule can be given; because some subjects require much more thought and investigation than others. As a general rule, I would advise you to be in your study from an

early hour, till dinner time, at least four days in a week, if not five. Sometimes you may be obliged to devote a few hours more to your preparations; but if you adhere rigidly to the system which I have recommended, you will, I have no doubt, in all ordinary cases find the time sufficient.

I am aware of the objection which may be made to all this, that it is altogether too *mechanical*. "My mind," some one may say, "will not work by square and compass. I can never go into my study, as the cabinet maker does into his shop, when the clock strikes, and stay there just so many hours, and turn off about the same amount of work from one day to another. If I am to make sermons, I must wait till I feel like it, and then they will flow warm from the heart, and betray none of that stiffness and formality, which a rigid adherence to fixed hours would give them." I am convinced, my dear E., that this objection, from whatever quarter it comes, is far more plausible than valid. It is not true that the mind cannot be trained to put forth its best energies at stated seasons; and it by no means follows, that the results of regular study, will be less free and natural, than the fitful outpourings of a mind, that has never been brought under this sort of discipline. The longer any minister accustoms himself to wait for his sermons to come to him, in some bright hour, which he cannot anticipate, with any certainty, the more seldom will they come at all: so that if he ever does anything worthy of himself, or of his sacred profession, it will be by screwing himself up to the task, when he can wait no longer. He may call this what he

pleases ; but it is just as *mechanical*, as bringing himself regularly to the work early in the week.

By adopting something like the system of weekly preparation for the pulpit, which I have above recommended, you will generally finish your discourses by Saturday, so as to look them over carefully, and have a good night's rest, and recruit your strength for the labors of the sabbath.

When you sit down to write, you sometimes will, no doubt, find it difficult to collect your scattered thoughts at the moment, and fix them upon the subject. If in these cases you take up a newspaper, or whatever other light reading may happen to be at hand, with the hope of luring the truants back, you will be disappointed. Nothing but stern and decided measures will answer. I would advise you to resort at once to Geometry, or Conic Sections, or some other equally inexorable discipline, to settle the business. I have myself often called in the aid of Euclid for a few moments, and always with good success. A little wholesome schooling of the mind upon lines and angles and proportions, when it is not in the right mood for study, will commonly make it quite willing to exchange them for the labor of composition, as the easier task of the two.

You will find yourself very much assisted in the choice of subjects, and in making your sermons, by keeping a scrap book always on your table, for putting down such texts and topics as strike your mind with peculiar force, especially in your daily reading of the scriptures. It often happens, that passages which we have read a thousand times suggest to us entirely

new trains of thought, which, if noted down at the moment, may be easily wrought into some of our best sermons. Sometimes you will merely put down the text ; at others, the whole plan of a discourse will flash upon your mind in a moment, which you never could have got a glimpse of by a week's study ; and it is a precious treasure, which you should by all means hoard up for future use. In this way, by committing to paper texts and plans and hints and references on a great variety of subjects, as they are suggested to your thoughts, you will be every day growing richer in materials to work up, as you may need them ; and you will always have an ample store, from which to make selections suited to your purpose, instead of being obliged to turn over the leaves of the Bible half a day for a text or a subject, and perhaps without fixing upon anything satisfactory after all. You may be greatly assisted also, by referring, under appropriate heads, to such striking historical facts and anecdotes, as you meet with in your reading, and as are most happily suited to illustrate and enforce religious truth, in your weekly ministrations. Let me caution you, however, to use such materials sparingly, lest you injure the texture of your own mind, and create in your hearers a disrelish for sober didactic discussion.

In writing your sermons, always use paper of a good substantial quality and the best black ink you can find. Write on a large page, with an open fair hand and wide spaces between the lines, so that you can catch every sentence with a single glance of your eye. These are little things, to be sure, but they

are of more importance than most beginners are aware of. Young preachers are apt to write in a small crowded hand, without much regard to the quality of the ink, or the paper ; because, while the thoughts are all fresh in their minds, they find no difficulty in the delivery. They forget, that the ink will fade, that their eyes will one day grow dim, and that they may want these very sermons to preach elsewhere. I never knew a minister of *fifty* regret that he wrote out his discourses in too large a hand when he was *thirty* ; but I have seen many exceedingly embarrassed in trying to decipher their early duodecimos, when those that “look out at the windows began to be darkened,” and they were actually obliged, as the last resort, to hold up the little manuscript as near their eyes as possible. This is extremely awkward, and extremely embarrassing. Begin on a bold and liberal scale. Buy your paper by the ream and your ink by the quart. Write your discourses in so sparse and legible hand, that you can run your eyes over them with perfect ease, as long as you live, and that your children’s children may read them with nearly the same ease as the printed page. It makes a good sermon better to write it in a fair round hand—better for the preacher, better for the hearers, and better for those who may take an interest in the productions of his pen, after he is gone.

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XIII.

MY DEAR E.

ONE of the great secrets of eminent usefulness in the pulpit, is skillful *adaptation*. When you sit down to prepare your discourses for the sabbath, therefore, the first thing is to consider the state of your flock. "Is there anything peculiar in the condition of the church or congregation at this time? Is any question, bearing upon the religious interests of the people, now agitated, which I can hope to settle? Is any dangerous error privily creeping in? Does any fundamental doctrine need to be discussed? Does vice in any one of its forms, call for prompt and decided public rebuke? Are there christian mourners who ought to be comforted? Are there anxious sinners here and there in the congregation, who should be immediately pointed to the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world? Are there contentions and backbitings and evil surmisings to be reprov'd? Are the wise and foolish virgins slumbering and sleeping together? Is worldliness creeping into the church, and eating out the vitals of religion?" Questions like these, springing up in the mind of the preacher and seriously looked at, will greatly assist him in the choice of subjects, from week to week, and help him to make the most of favorable opportunities. Many who are very diligent and strike hard blows, spend their strength for naught,

because they do not "strike while the iron is hot." More than half a minister's usefulness depends upon the weekly adaptation of his sermons to the state and wants of his people. It is easier to write such sermons than any other, because you then have a definite object. They are more interesting than any other, because they come more directly home to men's business and bosoms. They are more highly prized and better remembered, though in the abstract they may not be so able. The same discourse will be listened to with the most profound attention at one time, which would put half the audience to sleep at another. You can hardly spend too much thought, then, upon the choice of subjects.

Never, my dear E., begin a sermon without prayer, nor think of finishing it, without frequently lifting up your heart to God for the teaching of his spirit. If we are not "sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves," even in the discharge of our ordinary christian duties, how much more do we need divine help and illumination, in preparing to come before our dying fellow sinners as the messengers of the Lord of Hosts. I fear there are a great many finely written and popular sermons brought out of the study every sabbath day, without a word of prayer. If they do no good, can it be wondered at? In whose strength were they prepared? More prayer and less polish would be infinitely more effectual, than the most labored argumentation, or the most eloquent appeals, without prayer. The immortal Luther never uttered a truer sentiment than *Bene orasse est bene precasse.*

In writing your sermons, you can either make what is called a first draft, as a guide to careful re-writing, or you can write upon loose sheets, so as to throw out now and then a leaf, when it does not suit you, or you can fold and stitch the sheets together, before you put pen to paper, so as to make the first the *only* draft. I have tried each of these methods, and am prepared to express my decided preference for the last. If you depend upon a second draft, you will find it impossible to lay out your whole strength upon the first ; for you will be all the while thinking, “ though this and the other sentence, or paragraph is not just right, I will make it better next time.” The habit of re-writing, will cost you much more time and manual labor, without any adequate compensation. Doing about half as well as you can upon the first draft, and about the same upon the next, is by no means equivalent to girding up your mind to the work, and finishing the discourse at once. It does not hold true here, that two halves are equal to one whole. The same objection, as I have found by experience, lies in some degree against loose sheets. If you make your calculation before hand, to throw out now and then a leaf, you will of course have occasion to do it ; whereas, if you stitch your blank book and determine neither to re-write nor reject a single page, you will also make up your mind to do your best ; and in this way you will form the habit of careful and accurate composition, which will be of the greatest advantage to you in after life.

You will not understand me as objecting to your copying for the press, if you should ever publish any

of your sermons, nor as intending to dissuade you from a careful revision of them, from time to time, whether you ever allow any of them to appear in print, or not. On the contrary, I regard re-writing as a very useful and necessary exercise, where any one aims at a high degree of accuracy, force or elegance in his style. I hope if you should live to be *sixty*, you will be able to show a great many discourses, that have been written over three or four times. My advice not to depend at all on copying relates to your ordinary weekly preparations. Write every sermon as well as you can for present use, and then you will have many that are worth revising, but not otherwise. Some that are carelessly put together may possibly answer to make over, but it will generally cost you more trouble than to make new ones.

I would advise you, always before you enter upon the body of a discourse, to prepare a *skeleton* or well digested outline. This you may commit to writing, or carry along in your memory. The former method I think is the best. You will then have it in "black and white" before your eyes for a guide. Your Professors in the Seminary have told you, and told you truly, that you can hardly take too much pains in drawing out and wording the heads of a discourse. A good skeleton is more than half the sermon; and to be a good one, it must be definite, concise, logical and perspicuous. It must have unity, compactness and symmetry—bones, ligaments and just proportions. I intend to give you, in a future letter, some admirable specimens, from the sermons of a venerable living preacher.

But you must not misunderstand me here. I am far from recommending a mechanical uniformity in plans of sermons—just so many heads in the main body of every discourse, and then about the same number of inferences and remarks at the close. I should be sorry to have any of your stated hearers able to predict upon a wager, before you name your text, that you will have just so many divisions and subdivisions, let the subject be what it may. Variety is pleasing in everything, and not less so in the frame work of sermons, than elsewhere. We do not like to see the same guideboards everywhere, with the same lettering, and just the same distance apart, whatever path we take and which way soever we travel. Some texts require more divisions than others. You should consider well what you want to prove, or illustrate, or enforce, and follow nature, or rather I ought to say, follow the indications and leadings of the Holy Spirit, as far as possible, in the arrangement of your thoughts and arguments.

Make your own skeletons. I would not have you own *Simeon*, or any other work like it, for thrice its cost. It is unnatural, it is awkward to build upon another's foundation. It is patch work. You cannot get into the subject. You are in leading strings, and feel all the while that you have not the free and proper use of your own faculties. With your utmost pains to put on the muscles and fill out the skeleton, ten to one, it will be a lean affair after all. You can doubtless find a thousand plans of sermons better than you can make yourself; I mean, better in the *abstract*, or in the rhetorical class room, but not bet-

ter for *you*. When you think out your plan for yourself, it has at least one good thing to recommend it, it is your own. And the longer you rely on your own invention, the better you will succeed. Besides, in making your plan, you unconsciously make the best part of the sermon. When you get through, they are one and indivisible. And however disadvantageously your skeleton may compare with some other from the same text, in nineteen cases out of twenty, your sermon, as a whole, will be better than if you had borrowed from your neighbor, or from the most distinguished sermonizer of the age.

A good deal has been said against the formal announcement of distinct heads or divisions in preaching; but it does not appear to me, that there is very much weight in any of the objections which I have heard. It cannot indeed be denied, that some of the old divines, particularly the Non-conformists of the seventeenth century, carried the system of notation to an extravagant and bewildering extreme. But few of their hearers, I am sure, could have had sufficient room in their memories for so many figures. If I remember right, I once counted about *two hundred* divisions and subdivisions, in a sermon of Dr. Charnock; and in that sermon, or another by the same distinguished author, I think you will find *fifteen* divisions distinctly marked off by figures, before he states his doctrine. Now all will agree that that this is absurd. It defeats the great object of notation, which is that the plan of the discourse may be more easily remembered. But the objection lies against the abuse only of the system. It does not

follow, by any means, that because *two hundred* heads are worse than useless in a sermon, there ought to be no distinct divisions at all. A few may be of essential advantage, where a great number would only overload and perplex the memory.

The human mind is so constituted, as to require something of this sort. In travelling along a new road, we love to find waymarks, to aid our recollections of the country through which it passes, or to assist us in retracing our steps. And our impressions are far more definite and distinct than they would have been, upon a straight, dead level, without a house, or milestone, or tree to indicate our progress, or mark off the distances. So, in the case before us, whatever may be said of the few who are trained in the schools to habits of attention and reasoning, it is extremely clear to me, that the many are greatly assisted in hearing, understanding and recollecting discourses from the pulpit, by having the important divisions announced as I, II, III, &c. Nor is this all. As a general fact, the statements are more logical, the reasoning is clearer, and the conclusions are far more obvious and satisfactory, where the divisions are marked off, than where they are not. If the great object of your preaching was to show your taste and scholarship, you might perhaps dispense with them as too stiff and mechanical ; but as you preach to do good, to enlighten the minds, and save the souls of your hearers, I hope you will be as old fashioned in this respect as your father, and a great deal more successful.

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XIV.

MY DEAR E.

YOU have now folded your paper, selected your text, and drawn out your plan, but you have not yet composed your sermon ; and it is quite time to begin in earnest. This is the great point after all, to bring out a connected, well digested, instructive discourse. There are several ways in which sermons may be prepared, with more or less facility and advantage.

The *first* is, to write them out in *full*, so that the preacher may have every sentence, line and word before him, when he rises to address his audience.

Another method is, to use abbreviations, by which much of the manual labor is saved, without leaving out a single thought, or occasioning the least inconvenience in the delivery, as the abbreviations are perfectly familiar to the preacher. These two methods have always been employed, by the great body of the congregational ministers of New England.

A *third* is, to write in *short hand*, according to some approved system of stenography. This, I believe, is practised by very few however. I have never known but one preacher, who prepared his discourses in short hand, and he was a foreigner.

A *fourth* method is, to write out the more important parts of the sermon in full, and leave the filling up and application to the impulse of animated delivery. There are many examples of this, in all

parts of the United States, where the pen is used at all.

Still another method is, mentally to fill out a skeleton or memorandum in the study, and use the outline as a sort of general guide in the pulpit.

A *sixth* is, to compose the whole discourse, sentence by sentence, and paragraph by paragraph; without ever putting pen to paper, and then delivering it, word for word, on the next sabbath. This was done by a very dear friend of my own, who early lost the use of his eyes. He was an exceedingly clear and instructive preacher, and many years ago rested from his labors.

One other method still, of preparing sermons is, to study the subject more or less thoroughly, and to depend wholly on the impulse of the moment, for the language. This is, in some parts of the country, the more common method.

Of those preachers who go into the pulpit without any preparation at all, I say nothing here—my present object being to show, how sermons are *made*, and not how anybody can get up and talk without either plan, aim, or study.

Perhaps each of the foregoing methods of preparation has its own peculiar advantages; and there are many preachers who adopt sometimes one, and sometimes another, as best suits their convenience. Hardly any minister writes out everything in full, and most of those who spend many years in the sacred profession, sometimes preach from very short notes.

I shall give reasons directly, why I prefer *written* sermons, as the general rule; but I would not wish,

for other reasons, which I shall also give, to tie you down to any one method of preparing your discourses. While I hope you will write out at least one of them carefully every week, I am willing that, for the sake of variety, and to bring into exercise all your powers for the spiritual benefit of your congregation, you should occasionally try each of the methods which I have just specified.

I come now to the question, which has of late occasioned a good deal of discussion in some parts of the land, as to the comparative advantages and disadvantages of preaching with or without notes.

The General Assembly of the Old School Presbyterian Church, as you know, at their last meeting in Philadelphia, recommended the dispensing with the use of manuscript preparations altogether, and sent down the record to all the Synods and Presbyteries of their connection. What effect this advice has had upon the large and very respectable body of ministers, to whom it was addressed, I am not informed. I presume, however, that things remain very much as they were before. It is no easy matter to change habits of long standing. Those ministers, I dare say, who read sermons a year ago, read them still, and will continue to read them, though the same advice should be reiterated by the Assembly from year to year. So on the other hand, those who have been accustomed to preach without notes would adhere to the habit, if the Assembly at the next session should earnestly exhort every one to write out and read his sermons. This is a subject, which any ecclesiastical body can take up and show *reasons* ;

and if these reasons commend themselves to the judgment of those to whom they are addressed, a change may be gradually effected ; and this, I take it, is about all that can be done by mere *recommendation*. As for ghostly coercion, it might be resorted to with better prospects of success in any other country than this.

But to come directly to the merits of the question, between reading sermons in the pulpit and speaking extempore, it appears to me very much like enquiring what form of government is best in the abstract, or without any reference to the condition and character of the people to be governed. The republican form is undoubtedly best for us ; but would it be for China, or Japan ? So here, it is supposable certainly, that preaching written sermons may be the best mode in New England, while laying aside notes altogether may be the best in Missouri, or Arkansas. Everybody will admit, that in matters of this sort some regard at least should be paid to the habits and wishes of the people. Were you, my son, to go on a mission beyond the Rocky Mountains, or to any other point of the world, where the inhabitants would not tolerate written discourses, I would by all means have you preach without them. So on the other hand, were you to come and settle in Boston, it would be in vain to think of satisfying any respectable congregation of our order, with extempore preaching. It might do for a little while, but such are the “ notions ” which prevail there, that it would not last.

Nearly allied to this is another consideration, which shows the absurdity of attempting to establish a gen-

eral rule, without leaving room for many exceptions. "There are diversities of gifts" in the ministry, as well as in all the other professions. To speak well without the help of a manuscript, requires a self-possession, a readiness of thought, and a command of language, which all men, even of good education and respectable talents, do not possess. Many can write well and speak well from paper, who would utterly fail, if they were to lay it aside, and whom no early training could ever have made profitable off-hand preachers.

It is claimed, I know, by some, that the most eminently useful and popular preachers rarely, if ever, use notes in the pulpit. Let this be conceded, for the sake of argument, and what does it prove? That written sermons ought to be discarded from every pulpit, or even that the majority of ministers would preach better without than with them? *Non sequitur*. The question is not, whether a gifted few preach better without the written page before them, than they could with it, nor whether they excel all their brethren who write and read their sermons. This might be true, and yet the vast majority of preachers might be able to do more good with notes (written discourses, I mean,) than without them. Nor, admitting it to be true that extempore preaching is best in *some* of the older states and in the new settlements, does it follow, that it is *intrinsically* the best form of public religious instruction, nor that it would be best in New England or New York; nor even that it will be best, half a century hence, on the banks of the Mississippi and the Missouri.

There are some facts in the history of our country, which seem to favor the opposite conclusion. In many places, if I am rightly informed, where Presbyterian and Congregational ministers never thought of using notes, when the country was new, and could not have gained a hearing, if they had, the same preachers or their successors now carry their written sermons into the pulpit with perfect freedom ; and many of the more intelligent of their congregations like their preaching all the better for it. This proves something, especially as I am not aware, that in any part of the country where notes were ever generally used, they have been laid aside.

Another fact which has a good deal of weight in my own mind is, that in some denominations, where thirty years ago there was an inveterate and universal prejudice against written sermons, they are now tolerated and even prepared by many. All these denominations now have their own public seminaries, which they neither had nor wished for, when I entered the ministry ; and it is interesting to see, that just about in the same proportion, as their preachers are better educated, they, as it were imperceptibly, fall into the habit of writing sermons. It may not be the case everywhere ; but I am sure it is so in New England. Whatever may be said, therefore, against the old fashion of written preaching, or whatever ecclesiastical action may be taken on the subject, there seems but little probability at present of its being given up.

And is it desirable it should be ? This, after all, is the more important question. I have admitted for

argument's sake, that a few may rise to higher eminence as preachers, without ever having a manuscript before them, than if they wrote out and read their sermons. But it was *only* for argument's sake. I am now prepared to question the fact. I shall be referred, probably, to such burning and shining lights as the former Pastor of the Murray Street church in the city of New York, and I acknowledge that the late Dr. Mason was one of the most powerful and eloquent preachers I ever heard at home or abroad ; and I am aware too that he rarely wrote out, and never read his sermons ; but who is authorized to say, that if he had, he would have been a less distinguished ornament of the American pulpit ? He might not have been quite so eloquent, as he was in his happiest efforts, but would he have been less useful ? Would he have " reasoned upon righteousness, temperance and judgment to come," with less power ? Would his great soul have been fettered and chilled by having a manuscript before him, at which he might occasionally glance his eye, as he proceeded from topic to topic and argument to argument ? I do not believe it would. And though he might at times have lost something in the freedom of delivery, it is more than possible that his whole ministry might have been quite as useful—might have wrought quite as many gems into the crown of his rejoicing, in the day of the Lord Jesus. Having always been accustomed to preach from the page of the Bible and no other, he might not perhaps, in the decline of life, have carried any of his manuscripts into the pulpit, if he had written a thousand sermons in the earlier years of his

ministry ; but if he could have brought himself to it, would not his usefulness have been considerably prolonged ?

And do all the most honored and distinguished servants of Christ in the gospel, like Dr. Mason, habitually preach without notes, on the sabbath ? Was not Dr. Griffin, in the meridian of his day, an eloquent and powerful preacher ? Did his sermons lack unction, or were they delivered without feeling ? Let thousands of living witnesses testify. But his most able and impressive discourses were always written out in full, and delivered with the manuscript before him. Where shall we place Dr. Chalmers, if not in the first rank of living preachers ? And does he discard the use of notes in the pulpit ? Who has been for years the most popular preacher in London ? Is it not the Rev. Henry Melville of Camberwell, and yet, I believe he always has the manuscript fully written out before him. The immortal Edwards always used notes in the pulpit, and was not his preaching eminently blessed ?

It is an erroneous impression however, altogether so, that if a minister carries his sermons into the pulpit, and keeps them open before him, he must literally *read* them to his congregation. This is not at all necessary. I advocate no such habit. It is quite too formal and monotonous for a popular assembly ; and of very few preachers of my acquaintance can it justly be said that they are mere *readers* of what they have prepared in the study. It is easy enough for any minister who writes, as every one ought to write, in a large fair hand, to accustom him-

self, after he has carefully read over his discourse, to preach it without being very much confined to his notes. This is what may be seen every sabbath in many of our New England pulpits. And it is a great mistake to suppose, that a man cannot *feel*, if he has anything but the Bible before him; that glancing his eye over the successive pages of his manuscript must of course arrest and congeal the current of his affections. It might be so with one who had always been accustomed to extemporaneous speaking; but experience and observation abundantly prove, that it is not necessarily so. Indeed, if the warmth of a free delivery without notes, has a tendency on the one hand to kindle up religious emotion in the heart of the preacher, it may well be questioned, whether the mental effort which is demanded in extempore speaking, is not quite as likely to repress emotion on the other? How can any man's religious affections flow out freely, when his thoughts are confused, as they sometimes will be, if he depends on the impulse of the moment, and has to toil and struggle on through the hour, or half hour, under the painful consciousness, that he neither grasps the subject himself, nor presents it clearly to his audience?

But one of the greatest objections which I should feel to your commonly preaching without notes is, that it would imperceptibly lead you to content yourself with hasty superficial preparations. When a minister depends on writing for the sabbath, he knows that he must be about it, and that he must begin in season, or he cannot get ready; but the moment this pressure is taken off, there is a strong

temptation to relax, and to procrastinate. He may determine to spend as much time in his study, as if he could not utter a sentence without first writing it down. But he will not. I know too well what the native indolence of the human mind is. I have felt quite too much of it myself. It is scarcely hyperbolic to say, that *every man is as lazy as he can be*. There is not one in a hundred, who would work all day, if he could get along just about as well by working half the day.

In the freshness of his strength and the ardor of his first love, a minister who is resolved not to be trammelled at all in his delivery, may even write out his discourses for a time and commit them to memory ; and this might perhaps be the best method, if he could bind himself to it for life ; since it unites the advantages of careful writing, with a free elocution. But who is there that will do this for years, without faltering ? Who is there, that will not under the pressure of parochial duties, or the languor of ill health, gradually lay aside his pen and trust to easier and more superficial preparations ? I do not believe, my son, that if you were to form the habit of preaching habitually without notes, you would study half as much in seven years, whatever good resolutions you might form, as you will, by habitual writing, nor that your discourses would be more than half as able and instructive.

I know yours is a western congregation, and I suppose your people have been chiefly accustomed to extempore preaching ; but I take it for granted, they wish to be *instructed*, as well as *moved* by the preach-

er ; and I have not a single doubt, but that in one year, you can work such a revolution in their views of written and unwritten sermons, by practically showing the difference between them, that they will secretly rejoice, whenever they see you place a full written manuscript in the Bible before you. Even those who are most prejudiced against *reading* sermons, will acknowledge, that with very few exceptions, these are your best performances. You may think me extravagant in what I am about to add, and perhaps I am ; but I do not believe there is one distinguished preacher in *fifty*, who abjures notes in the pulpit, that studies his subjects near so well, or becomes near so able a theologian, as if he had accustomed himself to preach, a part of the time at least, from full and carefully prepared manuscripts.

There is another argument in favor of writing for the pulpit, which perhaps may not strike your mind, as it does mine ; but which, I flatter myself, you will think worthy of consideration. The minister who preaches without notes, will almost as a matter of course, write out but very few sermons ; which is the same thing as saying, that he will leave very little behind him, for the satisfaction of his friends, or the edification of the church. How bitterly do we often hear the admirers of celebrated preachers lament, after their decease, that their finest discourses are gone forever. I am as well aware as any body, that but few of the written sermons of ordinary preachers, have sufficient merit to call for their publication ; and that there is a great deal of light matter in almost any man's pile of manuscripts ; but that which would not

interest the public at all, may be precious and even profitable to children and children's children ; and in point of fact, we are indebted to the good old custom of writing sermons, for much of the best religious reading in our theological and family libraries. Some of the most useful of President Edwards' works, would in all probability, never have been written, had he not first brought out the substance of them, for the weekly instruction of his people.

You may possibly infer, my dear E., from the high estimate which I have put upon written sermons, compared with others, that I am going to advise you never to preach without writing, particularly on the sabbath. But you need feel no apprehensions on that score. I think you will find my views as liberal and accommodating as you could wish. So far from trying to persuade you to write out *every* sermon in full I should be sorry to have you do it. I wish you to be able to preach, and to preach well, without notes ; and, " if need so require," upon the shortest notice. My *beau ideal*, I confess, is this, that a minister should write out one sermon a week with great care and accuracy, and then after studying the subject of the other thoroughly, deliver it without writing at all. This is the method which I earnestly recommend for your adoption. By writing one discourse as well as you can, you will form and preserve the habit of close thinking and correct composition, while by delivering the other with extemporal freedom and animation, you will guard effectually against a dry and tiresome monotony. If you adopt this method, it will probably, in the beginning, cost

you more time to prepare for the latter exercise, than the former. You may find it easier to put down your thoughts upon paper, than to arrange and lay them up in your memory, so as to have entire command of them and bring them out at pleasure. But it is no objection to employing both modes, that it will cost more labor than either alone, provided it can be done. That it can be is certain, because it has been done. I can think of hardly any thing which would gratify me more than to hear, that the regular course of your ministry on the sabbath is, to preach an able, searching written discourse in the morning, and an equally well studied, connected and impressive unwritten discourse in the evening. Your ordinary weekly lectures may be still more free and extemporaneous. It cannot be expected, that you will find time to write them out, and if you could, they would be less familiar and profitable, than the out-pourings of a well furnished mind and a warm heart.

I am affectionately, &c.

LETTER XV.

MY DEAR E.

WHETHER you preach written, or unwritten sermons, some will require a great deal more study than others. I have heard of a minister who could write a sermon in an evening, and make *nothing* of it; and I am sure, that in such a case it can make very little difference, what text or subject is chosen. But as you wish to make *something* of every text, and as some passages of scripture are "harder to be understood" than others, you must spend more time upon them. To appropriate just so many hours, and no more, to the composition of a discourse, be the subject what it may, is absurd. Sometimes, when the theme is familiar, and the truth which you wish to enforce is indisputable, you will be able to write out the body of a sermon at one or two sittings. In other cases, after laboring hard for two or three days, you will find it impossible to do justice to the subject without more time, and when this happens, instead of spoiling the sermon by a hasty finish, lay it aside for another week, and take something else, or exchange, as circumstances may require. I hope, my dear E., that if God permits you to preach long, you will be able to show many sermons, which have cost you more than one, or two weeks, of hard study. If any of your off-hand brethren should wonder at your great pains taking,

let them wonder. The time may come, when they would be very glad to have access to your shelf of hard earned manuscripts.

But aside from the greater difficulty of doing justice to some topics than others, it is not necessary that all your discourses should be equally labored and finished. Some of the plainest, provided they are well timed, warm and practical, will do as much good as any others. But in a congregation like yours, where there are many educated, shrewd and intelligent hearers, it is necessary, now and then, to come out with a performance, which shall not only increase the esteem and confidence of your pious friends, but secure the respect of those, who make no pretensions to piety. In this way you will gain an influence over them, which you could scarcely hope to acquire in any other.

In giving shape and body to your preaching, you may make it either *topical*, *textual*, or *expository*; or you may, for the sake of variety, and to secure the peculiar advantages of each, sometimes construct your discourses upon one of these plans and sometimes upon another.

A *topical* preacher chooses his text with reference to some one point, which he wishes to prove, and having derived his doctrine from it, proceeds to establish it by such arguments and illustrations, as seem to him most pertinent and conclusive. Edwards, Bellamy, Dwight, Smalley, Strong and Emmons, were distinguished and powerful topical preachers. I do not mean, that all their discourses were constructed upon this plan, but that many of them were.

We have an example of this in Dr. Smalley's sermon, from Eph. 2 : 10. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." His doctrine is, *that fallen men must be new created, before they can do any works truly good.* The plan of this discourse is exceedingly simple. I. To explain the doctrine. II. To prove it ; and III. To answer objections. Another example we find in the first volume of Dr. Emmons's sermons. Gen. 32 : 28. "For as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed."

Doctrine.

It is the design of prayer to move God to bestow mercy.

In the same volume he has a sermon from Rom. 8 : 7, 8. "For the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be ; so then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

Doctrine.

The total depravity of sinners renders all their actions totally depraved.

This way of making sermons is recommended by some striking advantages. It better secures than any other the *unity* of a discourse, a capital excellence at which every preacher should aim. Every sermon ought to contain some one leading truth, to be proved, illustrated and applied, so as to leave the most distinct and powerful impression upon the audience. And it is much easier for any man to keep to the point, after he has laid down his proposition and bound himself to sustain it, than it is under any

more general statement. You will usually find, that topical sermons are clearer, more logical, better studied and more easily remembered, than almost any that you hear. As a class, those ministers who adopt this method of sermonizing are the ablest reasoners, if they are not the most eloquent and popular preachers. Some of your most elaborate discourses, I will not undertake to decide how large a proportion, but *some* of them ought to be constructed upon the topical plan. It will augment your strength and increase your usefulness.

But I must hasten to offer a few thoughts upon *textual* preaching. When a preacher selects a passage of scripture, and instead of making it the theme of some doctrinal or topical discussion, lays out his strength in explaining, opening and applying it, his sermon is *textual*. The verse which he chooses is not the foundation merely, it is also the frame work, it is the whole superstructure, from the foundation to the top stone. A good textual discourse brings out the full meaning of the passage, and shows us how much richer it is, how much more of divine truth is wrapped up in it, than we had been wont to suppose. One of the most charming textual preachers that I ever heard, is the Rev. William Jay of Bath, England. A volume of his sermons is now before me, and I cannot deny myself the pleasure of transcribing two or three of his plans, as among the finest specimens of textual developement, as well as the most concise, comprehensive and perfect skeletons, I have ever met with.

The first is from Ezek. 11 : 19, 20. “ And I will

give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you: and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh; that they may walk in my statutes and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.” Genuine religion, says Mr. Jay, is here developed in four essential articles. I. *Its Author*. II. *The disposition it produces*. III. *The obedience it demands*. IV. *The blessedness it ensures*. Another of his admirable plans is from Mark 4: 23. “If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.” We shall view these words, I. *As implying the authority of the speaker*. II. *As suggesting the importance of the subject*. III. *As appealing to impartial considerations*. IV. *As demanding practical improvement*. Another of Mr. Jay’s discourses in this volume, is from Psalm 84: 11. “For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” Let us consider what he is—*A sun and shield*. What he gives—*Grace and glory*. What he withholds—*No good thing*.

Another eminent textual preacher is the Rev. Henry Melville, minister of Camden Chapel, London. His plans are not so neat and perspicuous as Mr. Jay’s; but in bringing out the sense and marrow of scripture he is exceedingly happy. Upon plain common texts, I do not know where I can point you to his equal. He presents almost every passage he touches, in a light so original and striking, that it seems almost like a new text, and at the same time, his thoughts and illustrations grow so naturally out of

the text, that you wonder they had never occurred to you before. The style of these volumes is not exactly what I should recommend, though they contain some beautiful and a great deal of powerful writing; but they are rich, they are sweet, they are full of the ripe clusters of Eshcol. I have said already, my dear E., that I do not wish you to confine yourself exclusively to the textual method of sermonizing, but if you generally adopt it, I am persuaded you will read and study the Bible with more interest and profit to yourself, and make your discourses more strictly scriptural, as well as more instructive to your people.

It only remains, that I offer a few remarks upon *expository* preaching. This is recommended to us by the example of Christ and his Apostles, as well as by that of most of the christian fathers in the first three centuries. In looking back upon my own ministry of five and thirty years, I exceedingly regret, that I did not adopt this method early, and pursue it as one of the regular exercises of the sabbath; and I think the laying aside of this kind of public instruction is one of the great defects of modern preaching. I believe but few ministers now take up any of the books, either of the Old Testament or the New, systematically in the pulpit, on the Lord's day, and before the whole congregation. There is certainly a great deal of Biblical instruction in our Sabbath Schools and Bible Classes; and it is not uncommon, I suppose, for pastors in every part of the land, to have weekly expository exercises, in their vestries and lecture-rooms. But this I conceive is not enough.

It does not give the advantages of thorough doctrinal and practical exegesis, to all who need it. The whole congregation ought, as it were, to be organized into a Bible Class, for a part of the year at least ; that, with the sacred volume open before them, both old and young may follow the preacher from verse to verse, from paragraph to paragraph, from chapter to chapter, till the Gospel, Epistle, or whatever book it may be of either Testament is finished. This, were the exposition properly conducted, would tend to fix the attention of the whole audience ; would afford abundant matter for profitable conversation in families, and in conference and neighborhood meetings ; would suggest many important enquiries, which rarely occur to the mind in hearing a regular sermon, and would give the preacher opportunity to bring up every subject, that the Bible touches upon, in its proper place and connection. This is an advantage which the expository method of preaching alone can secure. As we go over the scriptures in this manner, new views of truth are continually elicited, and a thousand valuable thoughts are suggested, which cannot be brought into sermons, or which, if they could, would rarely occur to the mere topical, or textual preacher. Were a minister to live a hundred years, and take two new texts every sabbath, he would be in danger of leaving out some things after all, which the Holy Ghost regards as important, and which would have been suggested to him in the very first year of his ministry, had he “ expounded the scriptures in order ” to his people.

I hope, my dear son, you will effectually try this

ancient and divine method of pulpit instruction ; and that you will begin early. If you put it off very long, I am afraid your habits of preaching from isolated texts will get confirmed, and you will not begin at all. I do not recommend it, to save labor ; for a series of good expository discourses will cost you more study, than an equal number of sermons from separate texts. You might, no doubt, take up a chapter, or part of a chapter, and spend half an hour in reading it over to your congregation, and offering some common place remarks without much preparation, but nothing can be more uninteresting than such an exercise. Whatever method of pulpit instruction you adopt, you must make your people feel that it is worth listening to, or they will not be satisfied, and will not long put themselves to the trouble of attending upon your ministry. They come out to be interested, to be enlightened, to hear something which they can carry home to think of and talk about. Make your expositions therefore as rich and instructive as you can. Spare no pains. Study the chapter or paragraph thoroughly, before you open a commentary. Look out and compare parallel scriptures. Enter into the spirit of the writer. Consider when and where and for what purpose the book was written. Pray for that illumination which cometh down from the Father of lights, and which he alone can bestow. Draw out your own plan. First exhaust your own resources in filling it up, and then avail yourself of all the helps within your reach. In this way the exposition will be yours, and not Calvin's, nor Scott's, nor Macknight's, nor Henry's.

Whereas, if you first turn over all the commentaries you can find, you will lean upon them till your own strength is all gone. You will never be an independent thinker—an original ; but a mere copyist, and of course there will be no freshness, none of that glow, of that sparkling vivacity, which springs up in a man's own mind under proper training, and which pours itself out as from an inexhaustible fountain.

Before I dismiss this subject, let me give you one caution. Never astonish and bewilder your people with the show of great learning. If you were a professor of Sacred Literature, and teaching a class of theological students, you might go as critically into the original Hebrew and Greek, as you pleased. But remember, that you are preaching to a common audience which cannot follow you a step beyond the English translation. You can make them stare ; you can make plain unlettered christians wonder how anybody can know so much about strange languages, and some will take your new translation as all gospel, because you say so. But generally, this show of exegetical learning in the pulpit, will do more hurt than good. I do not say that it can never be safe or proper for you to put on the professor for a moment in the pulpit ; that you may never offer a new translation of a difficult passage, nor comment at all upon the received version. I must say, however, that none but a real scholar should do it, and that he should do it very sparingly indeed. Unless the preacher is known to be a good Biblical scholar, it is apt to make the impression upon a part of his audience, that he does it to show off himself, and to

shake the confidence of others in the vernacular translation. Of all places in the world, pedantry is most disgusting in the pulpit. I once heard a preacher, in explaining his text, 1 Samuel 18 : 1. "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David," &c., tell his hearers, that it was not such kind of *knitting* as they were familiar with in their families, and which was invented in such a year of the Christian era. Be as learned and critical in the study as you please. Take nothing upon trust, which you can investigate for yourself. Appeal to the highest authorities for your own satisfaction ; but when you come before your people, give them the *results* rather than the *process* of your labors. The one they can appreciate, but the other would only bewilder and unsettle them.

You will commonly, I suppose, take a new text for every new sermon ; and this perhaps, is ordinarily the best way. But *double* sermons are sometimes very profitable and even necessary. You cannot do justice to every subject in a single discourse, and breaking it up into two from separate texts, would often destroy the unity. Double sermons if not too frequent, will also give a pleasing variety to your preaching, and while they are more interesting and useful to your congregation, they will be easier for yourself. You will have one introduction to write, and one subject for the day, instead of two. And this will sometimes make a very material difference in the labor of preparation. Some ministers preach double sermons almost every sabbath. It is not so common, however, as it used to be when I was

young ; and I think the change is upon the whole for the better. *In medio tutissimus ibis*, you know, is my favorite motto. A few among the fathers, who have rested from their labors, were in the regular habit of finishing the body of their discourses in the forenoon, and reserving a long string of inferences for the afternoon. Dr. Emmons, lately deceased, was one of the most able and distinguished of this class of preachers. His people always knew, when the morning service closed, that he had been mounting heavy ordinance, and that he would bring his guns to bear with great effect upon the enemy's lines somewhere, though it was not always easy for the wisest of them to tell where. Could that venerable father return and resume his labors, I am not sure that I should wish him to adopt a different mode of preaching ; and I confess, that when I occasionally hear an able discourse constructed and divided in the same way, it interests me exceedingly. But it requires more talent to write sermons after Dr. Emmons's model, than we can expect to find in every pulpit. Saul's armor will not do for striplings.

Another method of pulpit instruction, which I like very much, is to make out a regular and connected series of discourses on some important subject—as the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, the Parables, the Golden Rule, the Fourth or any one of the Ten Commandments, the Character of Christ, the nature and evidences of True Religion, &c. &c. If young ministers would commence preaching in this way, and bring out two or three series of half a dozen discourses each, in the course of every year, they would

go over a vast deal of ground in a quarter of a century; would feed their flocks richly with “knowledge and understanding,” and would at the same time “grow up themselves, into the stature of perfect men.” May your friends who survive you find many series of well studied and eminently devout and scriptural sermons on the most important topics, among your manuscripts.

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XVI.

MY DEAR E.

I need not tell you, that a great deal depends upon the *manner*, as well as the *matter* of your preaching—upon the delivery as well as the preparation of your sermons. If you must be deficient anywhere, I had rather have it in the *form*, than the *power*; in the speaking, than in the doctrine; in the utterance, than in the thoughts. Still the manner is important. Always begin on a low key, and speak very slow at first, especially in a large house, or indeed in any house, to which you are not accustomed. This is the only way to try your voice, and get a perfect command of it. Some of the remotest of the congregation may not be able to hear the first sentence or two quite perfectly, I know; but if you enunciate every syllable distinctly, and linger as it were, for a moment, till every voice is hushed and every eye is fixed, hardly a word will be lost. Having commenced in this manner, you will find no difficulty in gradually raising your voice and increasing the volume of sound, so as to fill almost any church with great ease.

But if you strike a high note the very first sentence, and speak rapidly, you will from that moment lose the control of your voice. You cannot come down to a lower key, however sensible you may be of your mistake, or however anxious to correct it. You can rise and strain your organs more

and more, till you are perfectly exhausted ; but you cannot fall a note. Whoever may perceive your embarrassment and perspiration, and pity you, there you are, beyond the reach of help. Under such circumstances, proper inflections, cadences and emphasis are out of the question. Every thing is forced and unnatural. You have put yourself into a strait jacket, and you must wear it. Now this is entirely unnecessary. You have only to begin with short sentences and with a natural tone and pitch of voice, and your kindling emotions will do the rest. Some ministers complain of the weakness of their lungs and the extreme fatigue of preaching, who would find that they have vocal power enough for any ordinary place of worship, if they would only learn how to *begin*.

In public speaking, whatever may be the compass of your voice, let your articulation be distinct. This is essential to good speaking in the pulpit and everywhere else. Some preachers who have voice enough to speak to the waves in a storm, and who almost deafen you with their thunder, are not understood for want of proper enunciation ; while the clear mellow tones of others, who cannot make half the noise, fall upon the ear like sweet music, and every word is understood. I know a living preacher, whose whisper can be heard and make the blood of his audience thrill, in every part of the largest churches.

There is hardly any bad habit of speaking, against which I would more earnestly warn you, than that of falling into a pulpit tone in your preaching. I can-

not tell you exactly what I mean by a pulpit tone, but I believe you understand me perfectly. If not, whenever you hear a sort of affected monotonous solemnity, which, instead of moving your affections, either lulls you to sleep, or makes you nervous, you will know what I mean. Many pious and sensible preachers fall unconsciously into a tone, both in their prayers and sermons, which destroys half their usefulness. Their characters are above suspicion, their doctrines are sound and their discourses are well studied. But many, who would otherwise listen to them with pleasure, cannot endure their delivery; and from the majority of every congregation it takes away more than half the pleasure, if not the profit of their public ministrations. This great drawback upon their usefulness is unnecessary. No one need contract the habit, against which I am warning you. It is easily avoided, though hard to cure; and it is greatly to be desired, that every young preacher might have some one sufficiently watchful and friendly, to give him timely warning.

There is also a stately oratorical monotony in preaching, of a very different character, against which I would put you on your guard. The voice of the preacher is clear and strong; his enunciation is distinct; his cadences and inflections are very good; his attitude is dignified, and his gestures are natural; but after all he is not an interesting speaker. There is no variety in his tones and cadences. Like a well trained grenadier he marches with a measured tread through the whole exercise. Every sentence, taken by itself, is spoken extremely well; but the grand

difficulty is, it is spoken just like every other sentence, on the same key, just as loud and no louder, and with the same measured rising and falling slides from the beginning to the end of the discourse. Now monotony in the pulpit, as well as everywhere else, is always tiresome, and always will be. Good pulpit eloquence, without changing the tones and inflections of the voice, so as to make them correspond with the sentiments expressed and the emotions which we wish to excite, is a contradiction in terms. The finest voice and the finest modulations, that ever broke upon the ravished ear of a great assembly, if they did not rise and swell and die away like the waves in obedience to the spirit of the storm, would soon fatigue every hearer. Better to violate half the canons of rhetorical criticism in following nature, though it be in an awkward and blundering manner, than to rock your congregation to a dignified repose, by the stately lullaby which I have been attempting to describe. Not that this is the necessary alternative. Far from it. Let almost any preacher bestow a reasonable degree of pains upon the training of his voice ; let him consider that he is a "legate of the skies," an ambassador for God ; let him enter into the spirit of his high commission ; let him yield to the irrepressible yearnings of compassion for perishing souls, and he will speak well. What goes from the heart will reach the heart.

In all your preaching be deeply *serious*. What can be more entirely out of place, what can be more disgusting, more irreverent, than *levity* in the pulpit. Terribly, but most deservedly has the great christian

poet rebuked this glaring impropriety. Familiar as the passage must be to everybody, I cannot refrain from quoting it.

He that negotiates between God and man,
 As God's ambassador, the grand concerns
 Of judgment and of mercy, should beware
 Of lightness in his speech. 'Tis pitiful
 To court a grin, when you should woo a soul ;
 To break a jest when pity would inspire
 Pathetic exhortation ; and to address
 The skittish fancy with facetious tales,
 When sent with God's commission to the heart !
 So did not Paul. Direct me to a quirk
 Or merry turn in all he ever wrote,
 And I consent you take it for your text,
 Your only one, till sides and benches fail.

But still I grieve to say, that the christian heart is not seldom pained by levity of this sort in the sacred desk. The temptation to be witty and sarcastic easily besets some of the most popular preachers of almost every religious denomination. I have observed it, (very rarely to be sure,) but I have noticed it in men whom I greatly revere and admire. But what can they be thinking of ? Is there a solitary example in the Bible to justify it ? The greatest and holiest of all Preachers often excited the admiration of his friends and the hatred of his enemies by his pointed and powerful discourses ; but did he ever make his disciples, or the Scribes and Pharisees *laugh* ? It shocks one's feelings merely to ask the question. And is not Christ our great example in the pulpit, as well as out of it ? If now we turn to the Prophets and the Apostles, which of them ever delivered a witty message, or preached a witty sermon ? Did any of them make either the rulers, or the people, the

Jews, or the Gentiles laugh under their preaching? Did Isaiah, did Jeremiah, did Paul, or Peter, or John? Never—never. They felt that their commission was a serious commission, that the Bible was a serious book. They knew that God was serious, that Christ was serious, that heaven was serious, that hell was serious; and how could they cherish any but the most serious feelings, or utter any but the most serious sentiments in their proper vocation of “praying sinners in Christ’s stead, to be reconciled to God?”

I know the apology which is sometimes offered, that it is as natural for some men to be sharp and witty, as it is to breathe. Very well—then let them keep out of the sacred profession. If they cannot restrain themselves in the pulpit, it is no place for them, whatever may be their talents, or even their piety. What would a parent think, if at the funeral of his only son, his pastor should intentionally use some expression to make the people smile? But how much more reprehensible would it be, than if while that son was on trial for eternity the preceding sabbath, and hundreds of others with him, the same pastor had made them all smile at some extravagant expression, or witty remark in the course of his sermon? To avoid every appearance of levity in your preaching, and every incentive to it, you will often be obliged to change the word or phrase, which would most exactly express the idea you intend, for some other, not quite so appropriate, but far better befitting the time and the place. The man that cannot do this, and do it cheerfully, should be-

take himself to some other profession. It would no doubt be pushing this point to an unreasonable extreme, to say, that in no possible case, can a preacher excite a smile over his congregation, without himself being to blame for it. A word or a sentence may have a very different effect from what he intended, and he may be grieved and mortified to witness it. But such cases will very rarely occur, and when they do, they will serve to put him more effectually on his guard in future. I have no objection to a smile, to a hearty laugh, in its proper place. Man was made to laugh, as well as to weep ; but not in the house of God ; not under the dispensation of his word, not in "the gate of heaven." "Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, forever."

Be *bold and earnest*, my dear E., in your preaching, as one "who must give account." Do not hesitate to call things by their right names, for fear of giving offence. Sin is sin, and hell is hell, however unwilling some may be to hear about either. Wherever they went, the Apostles "preached boldly, in the name of the Lord Jesus," and so should all his ministers. But that holy boldness which I would recommend, is altogether different from mere natural courage ; from self-confidence ; from harshness. A preacher may act as if he intended to drive his congregation to heaven, instead of drawing them. He may take such an attitude and use such language, and utter it with such tones of voice, as to make the impression on his hearers, that he has no regard for their feelings, but is determined to say what he pleases, and cut his way through at all hazards. This is not

what I mean by ministerial boldness. It is rashness. It is to clothe himself in thunder without the lightnings, and to provoke resistance, where the sinner should be made to tremble and ask, "what must I do to be saved?" A minister may be bold in his delivery and yet courteous; may show that he has no fear but the fear of God before his eyes, and yet that he would on no account wound the feelings of a child, if he could help it.

Whenever you address your people on subjects of everlasting moment, let every one see that you are greatly in *earnest*; that your heart, as well as your mind, is full of the subject. Boldness in the pulpit is not exactly synonymous with earnestness, though they commonly go together. A preacher may be "as bold as a lion," and at the same time give very little evidence, that he is earnestly bent on the salvation of his hearers. I hope this will never be said of you. Let it appear in every sermon, that you are not acting a part, but that you mean just what you say, and that your "heart's desire and prayer to God for your people is, that they might be saved." This, by the divine blessing, will make the "word like fire, and like a hammer, that breaketh the rock in pieces." We love to see men in earnest in every lawful undertaking. We expect but little from them, where this is not the case. And if, as the Apostle Paul tells us, "it is good to be zealously affected always is a good thing," it is emphatically so in preaching the gospel. But I must not detain you on this point, as I have several other suggestions to offer.

Always be *tender* as well as bold and earnest in

your preaching. Let it appear in your countenance, in your eye, in the tones of your voice, and in your whole manner, how "greatly you long after your hearers in the bowels of Jesus Christ." Some good ministers seem to labor under the impression, that they cannot faithfully preach the terrors of the law, without putting them on in their delivery. The pulpit must thunder and lighten and quake as Sinai, or their duty is not fully discharged. The consequence is, they seem to their impenitent hearers to be destitute of that tender compassion, which nature itself teaches us ought always to be felt for those who are ready to perish, however much they may deserve to perish. Where the countenance is stern, and the voice loud and imperative, the unhappy impression is made, not only that the preacher believes they will be lost, if they do not regard what he says, but that he is almost willing they should be. O how different this, from the manner of our blessed Savior in pronouncing the awful doom of that wicked city, which thirsted for his blood, and would soon drink it. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children unto me, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate." How different from the great Apostle to the gentiles, in that most affecting appeal of his to the elders of Ephesus, "Watch and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day, with tears."

That is indeed a mistaken and cruel compassion,

which cries "Peace, peace," to the wicked ; which keeps back, or glosses over the most alarming truths of the Bible, from a reluctance to give pain to those whom we love. Let the guilt and danger of sinners be held up clearly and faithfully before them. Woe to the preacher, that flinches here. "So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel ; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die ; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand." There can be no doubt in regard to the warning. It must be given ; but the question is, as to the manner of giving it ; and it cannot be done with too much tenderness. The impression should always be left upon the assembly, at the close of the most alarming sermon, that the preacher most earnestly desires to save the wicked, "with fear pulling them out of the fire." Let those who are "stout hearted and far from righteousness" call it weakness if they choose. They will alter their opinions, when they come to experience what it is to perish.

Avoid *imitation* in your delivery. Be yourself, and not Professor A., nor Dr. B. If your manner is easy and natural, it will be your own. It may not be so good as that of some celebrated preacher, whom you have often heard ; but it will be original and not borrowed. Were you to copy after another, with ever so much care, or unconsciously to modulate your voice and school your gestures by his, ten chances to

one, you would copy more of his faults than of his excellences. This would render you ridiculous. And were you to succeed beyond all reasonable expectation, every body who had heard your master would be thinking of him all the time, much more than of your sermon—perchance be regretting, that with his *voice* and *manner*, they could not have his *thoughts* also. I do not deny, that we all speak from imitation. Our tones, cadences and inflections are mostly borrowed from our parents and others, who were about us in early childhood; and when a young disciple is studying his sacred profession, it is a great advantage to have correct models of pulpit eloquence before him. In forming his own style of speaking, let him profit by them, as much as he can. But I repeat it, when he comes out as a preacher, let the style and manner be his own. Let it not be a fac simile of Dr. M., saving the black hair and smooth forehead of twenty-five, but let it be our own young pastor, who has too much good sense to imitate any body, and with whose voice and delivery we are quite satisfied.

Again, in preaching always *look your audience in the face*. It betokens a proper degree of self-possession; and it is as much a mark of respect, for a minister to look at the congregation, when he is delivering his message, as it is for them to look at him. Every well bred man in social life not only turns his face towards those whom he addresses, but gives them his eye. Some preachers are very faulty here. They either confine their eyes very much to the Bible, even when they have no manuscript before them, or

look out upon vacancy, as it were, and hardly see who is present from the beginning to the end of the sermon. Such habits are extremely unfortunate in a public speaker. You can never get the command of your auditors; at any rate, you can never *know* that you have got it, unless you look at them. By glancing your eye from pew to pew, you soon excite a fixed attention in every part of the house, which you could hardly secure in any other way. We love to see that we are noticed. It makes us feel that what the speaker says, is intended for us; and we listen to him with new interest.

Besides, when addressing your congregation, you want the light of their countenances to quicken and encourage you. How can any man pour out his whole soul upon an audience, and carry them along with him, but by watching the effect of his arguments and appeals, as he proceeds from topic to topic? It is when the preacher, deeply impressed himself with the importance of his subject, looks his hearers in the face, and his feelings are communicated, like the electric spark, to their bosoms, and their kindling emotions, like the same spark are sent back to his, and this communication is kept up, and the flashes on both sides become more and more frequent and vivid, that the most powerful effect is produced.

Let all your exhortations and appeals from the pulpit be *direct*, not *personal*, but *individual* and *particular*. Every thing you say ought to be spoken as if you had a meaning and an aim. Some preachers are so very modest and cautious, that they rarely venture to come nearer than the *third* person even in

the application of their sermons—something after this sort. “We learn from what has been said, that sinners are “in an evil case;” that God is angry with them every day; and that if they do not “turn to the strong hold while they are prisoners of hope,” they must perish. How important that they should lay it to heart and repent,” &c. &c. This is preaching *about* sinners, but not *to* them. It is not saying “Thou art the man,” but *he* is the man, he is the sinner, and wherever he may be found, it behooves him to “flee from the wrath to come.” A minister may be so fearful of being personal, that when he preaches against some notoriously prevailing sin in his congregation, such as sabbath breaking, or intemperance, or profane swearing, he may in conclusion content himself with intimating, that if the subject applies to any one present, which he hopes is not the case, it becomes him to repent and reform. I have heard preachers, and I presume you have, after eloquently portraying the guilt and danger of impenitent sinners, wind up by saying, *If* there are any such in this assembly, they ought to take warning and repent.

Now, my dear E., let me warn you against too many of these *ifs* and *third* persons, whether singular or plural, in your sermons. I know the application of a searching discourse is sometimes a delicate matter. It is rarely if ever discreet to be *personal*; to point *at*, or to point *out* any one of your audience, so as to turn all eyes upon him, as if you had made the sermon on purpose for him. This is not the way to reform the gambler, the inebriate, or the sabbath breaker. If you would do him good, go

to him privately, address him kindly but faithfully, when no one is present to hear you. Deal with wicked men as *classes* and not as *individuals*, in the pulpit; and if any who belong to these classes, should complain that you evidently meant them, "be not careful to answer them in this matter." To preach against vice and mean nobody in particular, or nobody within fifty miles, would be absurd. You might about as well preach to the winds, and expect them to carry the report along with them, that you have spoken very eloquently, and that you must have meant your discourse for somebody. Christ and his Apostles always used the second person in their preaching. It was, "I say unto you, and not I say unto them." It was, "men and brethren, let me freely speak unto *you*," not to some third and absent party. These are examples which it is safe to follow, and I have no doubt the success of your preaching will depend very much upon its directness; very much upon making your people feel, that every word is meant for them and not for somebody else.

I have only one more caution to suggest in this letter, already too long, and that is, when there happens to be a striking passage in your sermon, never pause, as if you was afraid it would not be noticed; but let the audience find it out for themselves. It becomes you ever to be too much absorbed in your subject, to think of anything but presenting the truth in the clearest and most persuasive light in your power.

I am affectionately, &c.

LETTER XVII.

MY DEAR E.

I cannot dismiss the subject of *preaching*, without suggesting a few thoughts upon the preparation of *occasional* sermons. Besides his weekly preparations for the pulpit, every pastor will be expected to write appropriate discourses for special occasions. More of these will be called for in some parts of the country than others. In New England, as you very well know, our annual fasts and thanksgivings bring along with them their imperative demands upon the ministry ; and throughout the country, congregations expect to hear something more than common from their ministers, at the return of every new year, and when any great public calamity, or other remarkable providence calls for particular notice. Those who are “set for the defence of the gospel,” are expected also to preach at ordinations and installations ; before ecclesiastical bodies, and on other public occasions.

My first advice, therefore, on this head is, that whenever and wherever a suitable text or subject or plan for an occasional sermon strikes your mind, you put it down at the moment, if practicable, whether you are expecting soon to want it, or not. It may be a great help to you at a future day, when the call is unexpected, and you would be exceedingly embarrassed, if you had nothing in your common-place book to refer to. That nothing of this sort may be

lost, I would recommend it to you never to go abroad without a memorandum in your side pocket, for hints and references. In this way, you will be gradually enriching yourself with what is far more valuable to a minister than gold or silver. I carry the matter one step further. If when you are meditating upon your bed, "in the night watches," any important train of thought is suggested to your mind, which you are in danger of losing before morning, strike a light at once and note it down upon paper. This, we are told, was the habit of the immortal Edwards, and that we are indebted to it for some of the profoundest of his speculations. What if the night should happen to be so cold, as to give your blood a start for a moment, how slight would be the inconvenience, compared with the value of the acquisition.

My next advice is, that you lay out as much time and strength as you can afford, upon your occasional sermons. Study them thoroughly, and write them out in a fair legible hand. Let them always be appropriate. This is an essential quality, and it never fails to interest an audience, where the performance is otherwise respectable. Make your sermons of this class, as rich and attractive as you can. It is a shame for a minister, when the year comes round with all its solemn and monitory lessons, or when he is invited to preach at an ordination, or is appointed by his brethren to address them from the pulpit, at the meeting of an Association, Presbytery or Synod; I say it is a great shame for him, on any such occasion, to come forward with crude and hasty preparations; to *hash* up something just to keep his audience from

starving. If he has not the ability to write a suitable discourse, if he cannot command the time, or his health does not warrant the effort, or he is too lazy to make it, let him by all means decline at once. Ordinations and meetings of large ecclesiastical bodies are excellent opportunities for doing good, and every preacher who is put forward on such occasions, ought to make the most of them.

Here I might be more specific, were it necessary ; but your own good sense would anticipate me, in nearly all the suggestions I could offer. Is it a sermon for the new year, that you have got to prepare, how many appropriate texts will you find both in the Old Testament and the New. How many solemn reflections will spring up in your mind, upon the brevity of human life, the worth of time, the sundering of all earthly ties, and all the amazing certainties of death, judgment, and eternity. How will a recollection of the afflictive scenes through which you have passed in the discharge of your pastoral duties affect your own heart, and prepare you to affect the hearts of your people. How many seats in the house of God, which were occupied twelve months before, will you see vacated. How many bereaved families will meet your eye, as you look round upon your congregation. How loudly, if you are faithful, will the bill of mortality preach through lips of clay, which may be closed forever before another year has finished its circuit.

Is it a day of public thanksgiving that brings around you your beloved church and people in the house of God, to “bind their offerings to the horns

of his altar?" What a fine opportunity to recount the mercies of the Lord, and to draw out the best feelings of every pious heart in the sweet language of the Psalmist. "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come. Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice. Thou visitest the earth and waterest it; thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water; thou preparest them corn when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly; thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness, and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks: the vallies also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing." "Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem, praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the brass of thy gates, he hath blessed thy children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat." "Praise God in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts; praise him according to his excellent greatness. Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord."

Is it a day of public fasting and prayer that calls you out, such as our annual fast in New England, or a national fast like that which was observed after the death of President Harrison. It is the fittest occasion for discussing a variety of topics of great interest, and every pastor ought to make the most of it. Crying national sins, to be sure, may be pointed out and

animadverted upon at any time, and where no other opportunity offers, I hold it to be the duty of the public teachers of religion sometimes on the sabbath, to “cry aloud and not spare, to lift up their voices like a trumpet, to show unto the people their transgressions and their sins.” But it were better, perhaps, to do it for the most part in occasional discourses, where there are opportunities.

Far be it from me to advise you, even on a fast day, to meddle with *party politics*. You cannot do it without giving offence to one side, or the other; and if you could, the pulpit is no place to arraign and try, either those who are in power, or out of power—no place to unfurl the flag of either party. If the house of God must, in times of violent excitement, be desecrated in this manner, let the combatants themselves do it, and not the ministers of the Prince of Peace. I do not wish to dissuade you from acquainting yourself sufficiently with the politics of the country, to form an enlightened opinion on great questions involving its vital interests; nor do I object to your availing yourself of the elective franchise at the ballot boxes. On the contrary, I hold that ministers of the gospel have as good a right to vote for civil rulers, as any other class of men, and it is my conviction too, that they ought to use this right for bringing the best men into office, unless there is something peculiar in the state of their congregations to forbid it. I bless God, that you, my dear E., like the Apostle Paul, was “free born,” and I would have you maintain with him, “All things are *lawful* unto me,” though all things are not expedient. Of both

the lawfulness and expediency, you must judge, as well as you can.

But whether you "use your liberty" at the polls, or not, there can be no question, that it is proper for you on fast days and at other times, to discuss the fundamental principles of civil government, involving as they do, all the great interests of society. We are the freest nation in the world, and we believe that ours is the best form of government. But it requires more intelligence and wisdom than any other form to sustain it, and it is liable to great abuses in the administration. That preacher, therefore, who, availing himself of proper times and occasions, enlightens the public mind from the pulpit, especially in regard to the moral elements of national prosperity, and faithfully points out existing causes of national corruption, is entitled to the thanks of the whole community, and will receive the thanks of every true patriot.

So in regard to the character and qualifications of civil rulers. It would no doubt be very ill-advised for you, on any occasion, to indulge yourself in personal animadversions. Leave it to the newspapers. They will be sure to do enough, and more than enough, of that sort of work. They are used to thrusting and fencing; to deifying their favorites and abusing the best men of the opposite party. But indiscreet as it would be to call names, it is right, and to my mind, it is clearly a *duty*, for ministers of the gospel to point out the qualifications which civil magistrates ought to possess, and to exhort the people to elevate the best men they can find, to places of power and

trust. It is what I have been accustomed to do from time to time, during the whole course of my ministry, and I am not aware of ever having excited the complaints of either party on this score. I am the more specific here, because the scriptures lay great stress upon the character of civil rulers. "Thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties and rulers of tens." The God of Israel said, the rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God."

The duty of submission to the authorities of the state, you ought also earnestly to enjoin in the spirit of the New Testament. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers: for there is no power but of God. The powers that be, are ordained of God." But I must not enlarge. My views briefly expressed of the duty of preaching occasional sermons are before you. Your people and the public have a right to expect them, and to expect something more than common on these special occasions.

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XVIII.

MY DEAR E.

I cannot dismiss the subject of your pulpit performances, without offering a few hints upon *prayer*. Prayer as the only medium of communication between earth and heaven, is an exceedingly important part of public worship. In your sermons, you are the mouth of God to the people. In your prayers, you are the mouth of the people to God ; and O how important, that when you rise up in the great congregation, to address the "High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity," your "lips should be touched with a live coal from off his altar." Were you an Episcopal minister, the great thing would be to *read* well. Having all the prayers before you in the liturgy, you would of course feel no anxiety in regard to the *matter*. But as you are a Presbyterian, and pray without a book, the case is very different. You are responsible for the *matter*, as well as the *manner*. You must compose your prayers, either in the study, or in the pulpit.

Some theological teachers advise their pupils to write out their prayers at first, and commit them to memory. This method has undoubtedly some advantages ; and I had much rather you would adopt it, than go into the pulpit with a stammering tongue, or without any serious premeditation. But it seems to me liable to some weighty objections. If you

write out and commit your prayers, when you enter the ministry, you will be very apt to fall into a dull and formal monotony. The words and sentences, which you have committed to memory and repeated often, will occur to your mind, to the exclusion of other and equally appropriate language. The consequence will be, that you will never be likely to acquire the power of expressing your thoughts freely and copiously, on all the topics of prayer which will be suggested by the ever varying circumstances of your congregation. It appears to me, that the better way for theological students and young pastors is, to prepare themselves, not by writing, but by studying the scriptures, to pour out their hearts to God, as the thoughts arise in their minds. In this way, they will soon be able to express themselves with fluency and propriety on all occasions and at the shortest notice.

Am I right in thinking, that this branch of education for the ministry is less attended to than its importance demands? I confess it appears to me, that many of our young ministers *preach* much better than they *pray*. And may not the reason be that preaching has some how come to be thought a much more important branch of public worship than prayer. But is this a right view of the subject? Our fathers did not think so. They laid great stress upon appropriate fervent prayer, and were remarkable for the apt and free use of scripture in their prayers. They seemed to think, that the more of the Bible they could bring in, the better. Were they mistaken? Would the churches have been more edified with their devotional exercises in the sanctuary, if they had

breathed out the desires of their hearts more in polished sentences of their own, and less in the language of David and Isaiah and Paul? Whether it is because some of the younger brethren in the ministry, who preach exceedingly well, intentionally avoid the use of scripture in their prayers, or because it is so much less familiar to them than it was to the fathers, I shall not pretend to say; but whatever may be the reason, the difference is very striking indeed. Let those who hear the greatest number of preachers at home and abroad take particular notice and tell me, whether I am right or wrong in my impressions. Would it perceptibly shorten some of their prayers, to take out of them every word of scripture which they contain?

I hope, my son, that your prayers will be eminently Biblical, as well as fervent, comprehensive and appropriate. Nothing so enriches the devotional exercises of the sanctuary as the language of the inspired writers. Nothing breathes into these exercises so much of the breath of spiritual life. Nothing elevates an assembly of devout worshippers so near to the gate of heaven. You cannot study the word of God too diligently with reference to this particular object. It was said of an eminently devoted minister of the Old South Church, in the city of Boston, that he committed the whole book of Psalms to memory, so that he might always have at command an inexhaustible store of the most appropriate language for prayer. I would that ever young minister might be induced to do the same. The task once entered upon would be delightful, and might be accomplished in less than

half a year. One of these *hundred and fifty* sacred lyrics might upon an average be committed daily without the least interference with other duties. This single acquisition would make you infinitely richer, than thousands of gold and silver.

The leading and essential topics of prayer, are Invocation, Adoration, Confession, Petition and Thanksgiving. All these should be brought in every sabbath day, and you will find yourself greatly assisted by something like the methodical arrangement which is here indicated. Sometimes you will dwell longer upon one topic, sometimes upon another, and sometimes you will find it convenient, perhaps, to adopt a different order. But regard to method you must always have. If you commence without a plan, you will be liable to wander, you know not where, to fall into bewildering, if not "vain repetitions," and to protract the exercise to a tiresome length.

You will find it very much for your improvement in the gift of prayer, to make the chapter which you read in your family devotions, the main subject of the exercise, in the way of confession, petition, or thanksgiving, as either of these topics may be most distinctly suggested. You will also, if my own experience does not deceive me, derive much advantage to yourself, while you impress scriptural truth more deeply upon the hearts of your congregation, by going over the leading topics of your last sermon in prayer, while they are yet fresh in the minds of all. For example, if you preach on depravity, or faith, or repentance, in the forenoon, make that the burden of your first prayer in the afternoon. It is

well, I think, generally to confine your morning prayer chiefly to the state and wants of your own people, and to reserve the other and more public topics for the evening.

Avoid every thing like ostentation in prayer. Let your language be simple and child-like. Let your attitude be reverential, as becomes a worm of the dust addressing a God of infinite majesty and purity. Let the tones of your voice be solemn, but natural—supplicatory, but not affected. Let your enunciation be deliberate, but not drawling. Be careful not to weary the congregation by the unreasonable length of your prayers. On ordinary occasions a quarter of an hour before the sermon, and two or three minutes at the close is probably as long as is profitable, though I would by no means have you always confine yourself to any definite limits. Much will depend upon your own spiritual frame and that of your people.

As helps to improvement in prayer, let me recommend to you both Watts and Henry as invaluable. I do not see how a young minister can do without them.

One suggestion more, and I have done. Whenever you are called upon to make the introductory, or consecrating, or concluding prayer at an ordination, keep within your own proper limits, both as to time and topics. For want of a due regard to this caution, the whole ground is often gone over two or three times. In almost everything but the name, the first prayer is the ordaining prayer, and it is well if he who closes the exercises, does not go back and set the candidate over the people for the third time.

I am affectionately, &c.

LETTER XIX.

MY DEAR E.

YOU will, I presume, expect me to say something on the subject of *exchanges*. Taking it for granted that you may sometimes exchange pulpits and labors with your brethren, the question will arise in your mind, how often it is expedient to avail yourself of the accommodation. And this question involves two others. How much indulgence do you *need*, and how much will the best interests of your church and congregation allow you to *take*? I am afraid, that on this point you may think me rather too rigid, and perhaps suspect, that I must have forgotten how I used to feel, when driven into corners in the first years of my own ministry. But that is one of the things which I shall always remember. I know very well, what it is to be taken up nearly all the week with visiting the sick, attending funerals, and with other exhausting pastoral duties, and to be overtaken by the sabbath without any adequate preparation. Under such circumstances it is a great relief to exchange. But looking over the whole ground, my deliberate judgment is, that it is best for a minister to preach at home as much as he can. I will briefly state the reasons on which this opinion is formed, and leave you to weigh them at your leisure.

When you was ordained and took the pastoral oversight of the second church in L——, you was

solemnly charged to feed that particular flock, and under this charge you voluntarily assumed all the responsibility which it was intended to impose. It is to be presumed, at least so the partiality of a father construes it, that, before they gave you a call, the hearts of the people were drawn out towards you, and that they wished you to settle with them, because they were pleased and edified with your preaching. They elected you not to supply the desk by *proxy*, but that they might secure the stated exercises of a spiritual guide and teacher, to whom they were personally attached, and who dwelling among them, and acquainted with their wants, might know how to "give to every one his portion in due season." This, to my mind, is a weighty argument against your exchanging very often. Your church and congregation have claims upon you, which no other people can have; and if they had rather hear you preach from sabbath to sabbath, than any of those worthy brethren with whom you might exchange, you are bound to gratify them as far as your health will permit.

Another reason why a minister should generally occupy his own pulpit is, that he understands the state of his flock better than any other preacher can; and of course better knows how to adapt his discourses to their spiritual need. The brother, with whom he might exchange, is perhaps a much abler man than himself; but he is a stranger, I mean comparatively so, although he may be a near neighbor. He feels it, when he selects his discourses, and sometimes labors under the painful uncertainty all the

way through, whether he is edifying his audience or "beating the air." If the pastor's ordinary sermons are not near so well written, or so full of thoughts, they may do more good by their timely and skillful adaptation. An ounce ball, when it does execution, is better than a grape shot that whizzes by ; and the slightest blow, that hits the nail on the head, will drive it further than a hundred strokes of a trip-hammer striking within an inch of it.

A *third* important reason why a pastor should generally occupy his own pulpit is, that it gives him the advantage of systematic instruction, and of following up the good impressions of his discourses, which frequent exchanges are liable to obliterate. This reason may not strike you so forcibly now, as it will some years hence ; although one of the first lessons of experience in your preaching will be, that topics which are connected, and which you have chosen and arranged, with your eye upon the state of your flock, are far more interesting than those taken up at random, however ably discussed. When a minister, whose heart is set upon the salvation of his people has presented one great truth clearly to their minds, and some interest is excited, he is very apt to feel, that he has just been preparing the way for another, not only in the order of sequence, but of time ; and it often happens, that he hardly knows how to wait till the next sabbath, before he brings it out. He sees as clearly as the light, that so long as God works by means, a vast deal depends upon their *proximity*, as well as their connection and skillful adaptation. And in this view of the subject, though he may wish for

relief, and may have the utmost confidence in his brethren, to whom exchanges would be equally convenient, he will often feel it to be his duty to go on at home as long as he can. He will not rest easy, till he has consecutively presented the series of topics which he has in his mind, so as to secure the full advantage of making them support and strengthen each other. And besides all this, he will often lay great stress upon the advantages of watching the state of feeling in his congregation from sabbath to sabbath, that he may turn it to the best account in his weekly preparations. For myself, I do not see how a pastor can carry out any connected system of pulpit instruction, but by following it up as fast as the weeks revolve and his strength permits. If I may refer to my own ministry, I am satisfied that those portions of it, in which I was most regularly in my own pulpit, were the most useful ; though I never exchanged so much as many of my brethren.

A *fourth* reason why a minister should generally preach at home is, that the great body of his congregation, having become accustomed to his style and manner and trains of thought, will understand him better than they can a stranger or one whom they seldom hear. Every preacher has his own way of investigating subjects and presenting truth, and uses a great many words and phrases, which, if not peculiar to himself, may be said to characterize his style. At first, perhaps, these words and phrases are not well understood, but by sitting steadily under his ministry, and hearing them familiarly used in various connections, his congregation soon comprehend

their force and meaning, and listen to their pastor with increasing satisfaction. It often happens, that a preacher is much better liked at home, than abroad ; and better too, than those with whom he exchanges, simply because he is better understood ; and he is better understood for the reason which I have just given. He may not be half so good a writer or reasoner as the minister of the next parish, and yet impart more available instruction at home on any given sabbath, than his more gifted brother could, by an exchange of pulpits. It is delightful to find a pastor more popular among his own people than any other. It proves that he has won their hearts, and that they have learned to appreciate his merits.

I have still another argument to offer in favor of ministers steadily occupying their own pulpits. It secures the undivided attention of their congregations to the great truths which they are commissioned to preach. By seeing the form and countenance, and hearing the voice, from sabbath to sabbath, of one who teaches "good doctrine," we soon forget the extraneous circumstances of style and manner, and find our attention fixed upon the subject matter of his discourses. If we know him well, and have confidence in him as a humble and devoted servant of his Divine Master ; if we believe he preaches the truth ; if his sermons are characterized by deep seriousness and good sense, and there is nothing decidedly repulsive in his manner, we think little or nothing of the *man*. Our thoughts are upon his *message*. He seems to us not as an orator ; not as a master of rhetoric or of logic, but as an "ambassador

for Christ," and we have heard him so long, that we hardly know or care whether he is an accomplished or an ordinary speaker.

But how is it, when we hear half as many new preachers as there are sabbaths in the year? When we see a stranger in the pulpit, our curiosity is excited. Our attention is diverted, at least in some degree, from the *message* to the *man*. Before we are aware of it, perhaps, we find ourselves either admiring or criticising his style and manner of delivery, when our thoughts ought to be absorbed in the subject. The orator or the homely speaker stands between us and the truth. We go away to applaud or condemn, and thus lose about as much in one case as the other. If a minister were to exchange often with the same brother, or with but two or three of his nearest neighbors, the evil would not be so great, because the novelty would soon wear off. But where a pastor exchanges a great deal, and takes pains to gratify those of his congregation who have "itching ears," by giving them as great a variety as he can, he is sure in the long run, (and not very long either,) to make them dissatisfied with more than half the men they hear, and with himself among the rest. The prevailing habit will be, not to hear the word of the Lord and carry it home from sabbath to sabbath, to be made the subject of conversation, meditation and prayer, but to institute comparisons, to treasure up and quote brilliant passages, and to point out defects in style, arrangement, delivery, &c. &c.

It is hardly necessary to add, that all the objections, which lie against frequent exchanges, might be urged

with equal force against depending on casual assistance. I have known ministers, who, instead of going into the study and preparing for the sabbath, would be anxiously looking out all the week for somebody to come along, and thus bring themselves into great straits by Saturday night, especially if they had heard that Dr. or Mr. such a one was expected. They depended upon it, and what could they do, when thrown back, as they would often be, upon their own resources, or rather upon their own emptiness. But I will suppose a pastor to be so situated, that he can rely with confidence upon having a great deal of casual help, without putting himself at all out of the way to seek it. Is it best, either for him or his people, that he should step aside one half or one third of the time, and let strangers occupy his pulpit? I answer, no; and for the reasons which have been already given. Let him generally preach himself, whoever may happen to be in town. Perhaps I shall be told, that this will not do; and I know very well, that there are exceptions to this as well as every other general rule. Cases will occur, in which you cannot help inviting brethren from abroad to address your people, and in which you ought to be extremely thankful for their assistance. What I mean to insist upon is, that the best interests of your church and congregation require you to be the stated preacher. Others may be in town and able to preach; and what is more, be very able preachers; but what if they are? It often happens, that having worn themselves down with hard work at home, they are taking short excursions to recruit, and ought not to

be asked, much less *urged* to do anything: and that preacher must be exceedingly anxious to “show his gifts,” who does not prefer now and then to hear others, rather than officiate himself. The men, whom you are most likely to offend by not asking them, are the weaker brethren; and though you ought to be tender of their feelings, you may not sacrifice the spiritual interests of your flock to attest the sincerity of your ministerial fellowship.

While on this topic, let me throw out a caution against taking every man for a regular minister, and as worthy of being introduced into your pulpit, who puts on the clerical garb, and claims to be received and listened to as a christian teacher. There are empirics and impostors in the sacred profession, as well as in others. Men thrust themselves into the ministry, who are entirely destitute of the most essential qualifications, and some of them are so extremely plausible in their pretensions, that “if it were possible they would deceive the very elect.” When a stranger calls to spend the sabbath, however well he may appear, before you invite him to preach, ask him for his testimonials. If he is what he claims to be, a minister in good standing, he will most cheerfully produce them, or rather he will anticipate you by presenting them at once, before you have time to ask for them. If his papers are not explicit and satisfactory, or if they emanate from a questionable source, he is not the man to be introduced into your pulpit. It would perhaps be a great relief to have help. The state of your health may earnestly plead for it, and some of your friends may urge you to

accept it for once, though every thing is not so regular as your could wish. But it will not do. You are answerable to God for a strait forward course. He expects you to guard the door of your pulpit against all intruders. If you are unable to occupy it and no good brother can help you, shut it up. If you are but poorly prepared, do as well as you can ; but give no countenance to any one who would "climb up some other way."

Without taking back any thing which I have said in regard to ministerial exchanges, I am now prepared, my dear E., to relieve your mind by expressing my approbation of every reasonable and necessary indulgence. I would not shut you up from the beginning of the year to the end of it, if you could sustain the labor just as well as not. It is right and proper, that you should occasionally preach to other congregations, and that your brethren should come and preach to yours. It promotes good feeling, and strengthens the bonds of christian fellowship. Kept within due bounds, exchanges are no doubt profitable both to ministers and people. And then young pastors must have occasional relief, in one way or another, from their studies. They cannot prepare two good sermons every week, year in and year out. Here and there a highly gifted preacher might do it perhaps ; but the majority would break down under the labor. When they find themselves exhausted, they must relax and help one another. This they can do by exchanges, and so far as it is necessary, their people ought to be satisfied, and even to encourage it. How frequently you may need the indulgence

now in the commencement of your ministry, it is impossible for me to say, and no universal rule can be given. I should hope not more than once or twice in a month and less frequently, as you become more accustomed to writing sermons. Something will depend upon the demands of your congregation. If they set up a very high standard, and are not willing to hear some plain and ordinary discourses, and you think it a duty to yield to their wishes, you must exchange the oftener. But if they leave the matter with you to do the best you can, as I presume they will so long as they see that you are active and laborious in your sacred calling, you will in the course of three or four years find it about as easy to preach at home as to go abroad upon exchanges.

But when, after long experience and habit, should God be pleased to spare your life, you find yourself quite at ease, and rather averse to going from home, do not forget your younger brethren. They will need the same assistance and indulgences which you do now. Deem it no hardship to put yourself to considerable inconvenience, if need be, for their accommodation. It is brotherly. It is required by the golden rule. It will be remembered with gratitude, when you are in your grave. I am sure, I shall always remember the kindness of a venerable father in the neighborhood of my first parish. It was no accommodation to him to exchange, but the contrary. He loved his home and his own pulpit better than any other place. But when I got into trouble, as I sometimes did, and felt that I had nothing to say to my own people which was worth their hearing, I

always knew where to go for help. I was sure of being received as a son "in the gospel," and that he would make the desired exchange, whatever personal inconvenience it might cost him.

Before closing this letter, I have a word to say about exchanging with men, whose avowed sentiments you regard as fundamentally erroneous, or who studiously conceal their real sentiments from motives of policy. Exchanging pulpits is an act of ministerial fellowship. Whenever you invite a preacher to occupy your place, you virtually say to your church and congregation, that you have confidence in him as a man of correct theological opinions, and a true servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. For the time being, you confide their immortal interests to his keeping. You, as it were, endorse for him. You bid him "God speed." If he teaches error, you are answerable for it. And if his discourses amount to nothing one way or the other, you are answerable. Life is too short, every soul commended to your pastoral care is too precious, to lose a single sabbath. That identical sabbath may be the last, that some anxious or careless sinner has to spend on earth.

It would alter the case very little, were the known errorist, who solicits an exchange, to stipulate, that he would not touch at all upon points, in which you disagree, nor say anything against which you could object. Suppose he should not; suppose he should deliver as excellent moral discourses, as any one could wish to hear. Still you know him to hold sentiments which you look upon as fatal. Your church knows it; your congregation knows it, and will

they not infer, that there cannot after all be any essential difference between your opinions and his. "Surely," they will say, "surely 'our pastor who is so watchful over our religious interests, would never have made the exchange, had he believed this man to be a heretic."

Nor, *finally*, would it mend the matter to say, that the man, with whom you exchange, has never *come out* and declared himself. Strange as it may seem to you, this plea has been used by ministers of high standing in professedly evangelical churches. I do not know that it is used now. I hope the day is past. They were not sure, they said, that the preachers, with whom they sometimes exchanged, had embraced what they considered fundamental errors, because they had no proof of an explicit avowal. But they did know, that these preachers were generally understood to have repudiated some of the essential doctrines of the gospel, and yet they continued to extend to them the right hand of fellowship. If you have any reason to suspect that your neighbor, who solicits an exchange of ministerial labors, is not sound in the faith, pause and let that doubt be removed before you give an affirmative answer.

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XX.

MY DEAR E.

I have a few more things to say on the subject of exchanges, which I could not find room for in my last letter. Whenever you go into a brother's pulpit, let it be your great aim to do all the good you can. Ministers are apt to be tempted, when they exchange, to select and preach their ablest and most popular sermons. Were it right for the servants of Christ to have a supreme regard to their own reputation as scholars, or theologians, they might be commended for their good judgment in these selections. But if it ought to be their grand object to "win souls" by their preaching, abroad as well as at home, then this governing motive should determine them in the choice of subjects. Every preacher knows, or ought to know, that the discourses, which have cost him the most study, and show the most logical acumen or literary taste, are not always best adapted to the apprehension and spiritual wants of a common audience. By preparing a few sermons with great care for exchanges, you might perhaps raise yourself, in the estimation of cultivated minds abroad, somewhat higher than by plain exhibitions of the truth, and direct appeals to the conscience. But if you intend not to preach yourself, but "Jesus Christ and him crucified;" if your "heart's desire" is, "to save them that hear you," as well in another's congregation as

your own, you will take those discourses along with you, which you have reason to hope will make the best religious impression. Let me advise you to do the same when you travel. It is a common remark, that you will hear the poorest, by which is meant the most unprofitable preaching, at the great watering places, whether on the sea-board or about the mineral fountains of the interior. This is not because the ministers who visit such places are men of inferior talents, nor because they do not generally preach well at home, but because almost every one feels as if he must preach a *great* sermon. Such fashionable audiences, it seems to be supposed, will not tolerate plain gospel preaching. Let any one go and spend the three summer months in Saratoga, and after he has heard some twenty or thirty sermons from as many strangers, let him tell us what he thinks of these discourses. He will probably answer, that most of them were very able, or very eloquent, and that he was exceedingly delighted with such and such distinguished preachers. But if he is a good man, and a man of sound judgment, will he say, that he thinks he has been more profited than he would have been under the weekly "droppings" of his own sanctuary? Will he not say, that in the midst of this profusion of pulpit luxuries, he longed for "the sincere milk of the word," in some humble country tabernacle?

As so much depends upon *adaptation*, you should, whenever you exchange and have opportunity, enquire of your brother, what is the state of his church and congregation, and select such topics, as he thinks

will be most timely and useful. I know, that an arrow from a bow drawn at a venture may sometimes take effect; but in all ordinary cases, a deliberate aim is far better; and how can your aim be sure in a strange congregation, without some direction. The preacher who thinks he knows what discourses are wanted there, at any given time, as well as the pastor can tell him, certainly "thinks more highly of himself than he ought to think," and has no reason to expect a special blessing upon his labors.

Another remark I wish to make in this connection. You can often "strengthen the hands" of the brethren, with whom you exchange, by preaching on those hard doctrines, which they feel constrained to bring forward and defend, and under which there is always more or less restiveness in every congregation. Is it the absolute and rightful sovereignty of God in the saving dispensation of his grace; is it the doctrine of total depravity, of the justice of God in the eternal punishment of the wicked, of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, or any other doctrine which is often "spoken against." Now and then an able and judicious discourse by a stranger, on these topics, has an excellent effect. It silences those who represent their pastor as more rigid than other preachers of the same faith, cheers his heart under manifold discouragements, and strengthens his resolution to "declare all the counsel of God."

There is one other topic on which I feel constrained to make some remarks, before I dismiss the subject of ministerial exchanges. I allude to the proper time for *going* and *returning*. When you make an

exchange with a brother in the next town or parish, may you go on Sabbath morning, or does a proper regard to the fourth commandment require you to go on Saturday? It is either right or wrong, to travel five or ten miles on the Lord's day, to fulfil such an engagement: and it is highly important that the question should be settled in the fear of God. It is exceedingly to be regretted, that ministers of high standing and great influence differ in their views and habits, where so much depends upon their "seeing eye to eye and minding the same things." It is not very uncommon, (I grieve to say it,) even in New England, for pastors when they exchange, to ride from five to fifteen miles on Sabbath morning. Sometimes they have an hour or two to rest before the service begins, but it not unfrequently happens, that they scarcely "save their distance." The bell is ringing, or perchance the audience is waiting, when they arrive. That they mean to keep the Sabbath holy, and of course that their practice is "right in their own eyes," it were uncharitable to doubt. But is it right in the sight of God? Is it "abstaining from all appearance of evil?" Is it setting a good example either to the church, or the world?

I am not ignorant of the arguments on which they rest their defence. They tell us, that, in their view, the prohibitions of the fourth commandment relate to *secular* employments only; that the performance of religious duties is the appropriate business of the Lord's day; that the most important of these is preaching the gospel; that when ministers ride a few miles to exchange labors, it is for a *sacred* purpose,

and ought to be regarded in the same light as the necessary travel of those who go to hear the gospel ; that ministers, as well as private christians, ought to be at home on Saturday evening with their families ; that the heaven-wide difference between travelling fifteen or twenty miles to preach, and going the same distance upon business or for pleasure, is so clear, that none but the willfully blind can help seeing it ; &c. &c.

That there is a good deal of plausibility in some of these arguments I readily admit. But will they bear examination ? Let us see. If they will not abide the scrutiny of the " great day," the sooner they are given up, the better. But before we examine them, let us enquire for a moment, when a minister may be said to break the Sabbath by going from home to preach, if he breaks it at all ? I do not suppose, that where churches are quite near together, as in cities and thickly populated towns, the law of the Sabbath requires ministers to go from home on Saturday. A pastor is often nearer his brother's church than his own ; and when he is farther off, his walking a mile or two, does not seem to trench upon the sacred rest. I know very well, that some one may ask, " If you make this allowance, where will you draw the line ? If one minister may walk *two miles*, on an exchange, why may not another walk or ride *two miles and a half*, another *three*, and so on ? If I may go to preach out of my own church in the next street, will you tell me just where I must stop ?"

I frankly confess there is a difficulty in drawing the line, and I shall not attempt it. But the same

difficulty exists in a thousand other cases, where all admit, that there are limits beyond which we cannot innocently go. There is a doubtful territory of considerable extent, somewhere within which the Omniscient eye sees the exact line ; but we can neither point it out to others, nor discern it ourselves. If this is an inconvenience, we must submit to it, for it is a limitation which infinite wisdom has prescribed to all our faculties in the present world. It will give us very little trouble, however, provided we just stop short of the doubtful territory. Let me illustrate. There can be no room for doubt, that you may walk from your own house to any church in L—— on Sabbath morning, nor that you might go a mile beyond the city limits, were there a pulpit for you to occupy by way of exchange. But may you therefore go *five* miles ; and if *five*, then *ten*, and if *ten*, then *twenty* ! This by no means follows. The extremes on each side are plain enough ; but between these, it were unreasonable to demand a perfectly distinct line, which we might touch without any danger of stepping over. We need this indefiniteness to try us—to show, whether or not we are determined to keep on the safe side—whether we had rather stop a mile short, than go a quarter of a mile beyond.

My *first* and grand objection to ministers' going from town to town on the Sabbath, in making their exchanges is, that I think it a breach of the fourth commandment. That travelling for business or pleasure, as far as many clergymen do to exchange, would be an infraction of the divine law, all will agree, who believe in the sacredness and perpetuity of the sab-

batical institution. Where is the pastor who would not decide at once, if a member of his church were to ride ten miles, to close a bargain, or buy a horse, that it was wrong, even though he might attend church both parts of the day? It would be neither a work of necessity nor mercy; but a matter of mere worldly gain or convenience. For reasons which I have given at some length in my little book on the Sabbath, I think all but works of *mercy* are forbidden in the fourth commandment. If a minister can show that it is a work of mercy, to ride five, ten, or even fifteen miles to preach the gospel, as much as it was to pull an ox out of a pit, or to heal one sick of the palsy, I have no more to say. And this the missionary can often show beyond a question. Those to whom he is going to preach, would have no one to break the bread of life to them were he to disappoint them, and his stations for preaching are so far apart, that in some instances, he cannot be at the place on Saturday. But how is it with settled pastors? Would any of their congregations be destitute if they were all to stay at home? How then can it be proved, that it is a work of *mercy* for any two of them to exchange pulpits, or if it is, that either of them may go on the Sabbath? If they exchange at all, why should they not go on a week day, as well as common laborers to their work in a distant town, or as if they were going to buy goods, or look at a farm? The object is different to be sure. Their calling is a *sacred* and not a *secular* calling. But what essential difference does it make, when it is just as easy for a minister to go to the next town on Saturday, as it is

for his neighbor, whose secular business calls him there? What argument can a settled pastor use to justify him in staying at home over night, which any christian parent, whose public duties or private concerns require him to spend much of his time abroad, might not urge with still greater plausibility; especially as those who exchange may spend the evenings before and after the Sabbath, in each other's families, and perhaps do more good by religious conversation and instruction, than they could at home? Let me ask this simple question. Do not ministers ordinarily exchange for their own mutual convenience, as well as to promote the religious interests of their congregations? Does it not save them hours and days of hard study; and is not this saving of time more than enough, to compensate for what they consume in going and returning, without encroaching upon the Sabbath? Should any one reply, that he had rather stay at home, and prepare for his own pulpit, than go abroad, let him do so; but when he goes, though it be merely to oblige a brother, let him take secular time for it, unless he can prove that it is a work of *necessity* or *mercy*, to *travel*, as well as to *preach* on the Lord's day. I submit it to every candid mind, whether he must not prove this, or be counted a sabbath breaker. If when you have negotiated an exchange, and your brother relies upon it, you are prevented from going on Saturday, by temporary indisposition, or by sickness in your family, or some other unforeseen and unavoidable hindrance, it alters the case very materially. It was in your heart to go before the Sabbath, and having been providen-

tially hindered, you seem to have a valid excuse for going in the morning. I am satisfied, that many excellent ministers deceive themselves and quiet their consciences in violating the fourth commandment, by identifying the duty of preaching the gospel every Sabbath, with the right to travel from one town to another for the purpose. *Preaching* is the proper work of the Sabbath and therefore a sacred duty. But what is there sacred or religious, in riding ten or fifteen miles, on the morning of the first day of the week, more than another day? The thing to be defended is not *preaching*, but *travelling*—taking holy time for that, which might have been done before. And in nine cases out of ten, is not private convenience at the bottom, after all? Verily, “the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it, and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.”

But supposing it was not a direct violation of the sabbatical law, for ministers to travel, would it be right for them to set such an example before the church and the world? Is not the hold of the Sabbath upon the public mind very much weakened by this practice? Is there any hope of preserving the sacred institution, from general desecration, unless the public teachers of religion rally round it? Do they not, by travelling themselves in the manner above pointed out, tie up their own hands, and seal their own lips? How can they preach against sabbath breaking, with the least prospect of doing good?

Having argued the question briefly, upon the fourth section of the Decalogue, I now put it upon the

ground of christian *duty* and *expediency* ; and shall arrange what few thoughts I have further to offer, under three distinct heads.

In the first place, were you, my dear E., when you make exchanges out of town, to go or return on the Sabbath, you would grieve some of the best members of your church. I do not speak from personal knowledge at all ; but from a full persuasion that there are such members in every church, as enlightened and evangelical as yours. For fear of hurting your feelings, or of being counted “righteous over much,” they might never speak to you on the subject, and possibly no report of their grief might ever reach your ears. Still it might be in their hearts like a burning fire, shut up in their bones. Witnessing the effect of your example, from year to year, upon other members of the church, upon the influential men of the congregation, and perhaps upon their own children, they would weep in secret places ; and would not their cries “enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth ?” Were their feelings in any way to come to your knowledge, you might regard and speak of them as “the weaker brethren”—persons of narrow views, and of little or no influence. And you might contrive in this way to keep your own conscience quiet. But would it do to trifle in this way with the religious scruples of even the weakest of Christ’s disciples ? Might it not be offending his little ones, to your own extreme confusion in the Judgment of the great day ? Besides, they are not the weak and over-scrupulous professors alone, who believe it wrong for ministers to travel on the Sabbath,

in making their exchanges. It is the settled conviction, I believe, of a majority of the most pious and enlightened christians in the land. If I thought you would give any of your church occasion to mourn over your example in this regard, I should certainly expostulate with you in terms like these.

“ My dear son, pause, I entreat you, and consider what you are doing. You cannot plead that you are constrained to grieve these brethren, in the discharge of your ministerial duties. It cannot be a matter of conscience with you to travel on the Lord’s day, for an exchange of labors—nor can it occasion you any great inconvenience to go on Saturday. The sacrifice on your part would be very trifling. But with some of the most prayerful and pious of your church members, the conviction is deep and settled, that you are breaking the Sabbath and nullifying your own preaching. When they witness your example, they go mourning all the day, and they cannot help it. You may think them mistaken, but you cannot doubt their sincerity ; and what does it argue, if you will not make the trifling sacrifice which would relieve and satisfy them ? What would the Apostle Paul do in a similar case ? He shall answer. “ We then that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let every one please his neighbor for good to edification.” Thus as a father, would I entreat you, if I thought there was any occasion for it ; but my confidence in you will not allow me to believe there is.”

In the second place, were you to travel on the Sabbath to make exchanges, you would not only

grieve some of the brethren, but induce others to violate the "holy commandment" whose scruples have hitherto restrained them; and the more confidence they might have in your piety and in your knowledge of the Scriptures, the greater would be the danger. Ministers are expected to be more strict in their religious habits than the generality of private christians. If you were to make it a practice when you exchange, to go out of town five or ten miles on the Lord's day, how many of your church would come at length to think, they might travel as well as you. *You* would make a distinction. You would tell them there is an essential difference between going abroad to preach and for any secular purpose. But it is morally certain that many would not see it; and some would ultimately be led by your example to "wound their own consciences."

Now, ought not this consideration to deter every minister from travelling on the Lord's day for exchanges, if there were no other objection? Supposing for a moment, and only for a moment, that it were, in itself considered, a matter of entire indifference, like eating or not eating meat offered in sacrifice to idols, would it not be his duty to abstain? Might we not reason with him as the great Apostle to the Gentiles reasoned? "Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak. For if any man see thee who has knowledge, travelling on the Lord's day, shall not the conscience of him that is weak be emboldened to travel also? And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom

Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore if travelling on the Lord's day, to exchange pulpit labors, make my brother to offend, I will travel no more while the world standeth, lest I make my brother offend."

In the third place ; were you in making exchanges to go and come on the Sabbath, your example would tend exceedingly to encourage the irreligious in their habitual violations of this sacred institution. Your habit would be known of course. You would be seen by multitudes on the way, and they would be more glad to see you then, than on any other day of the week. If their consciences had begun to give them trouble, they would be greatly relieved. You could not stop and reprove them ; and if you did, what good would it do? They are riding out, and so are you. You may have a better reason than they can offer, but will they hear it? Can you convince a man who makes no pretenses to religion, that if it is right for you to travel ten miles on *your* business, it is not right for him to travel as far, or farther, on his? Where one person will admit the distinction which you make in your own favor, on the score of your sacred profession, two will deny that there is any foundation for it. You go abroad on the Sabbath, they will say, for your convenience, and we go for ours. If a minister who is so much looked up to for good examples, may travel one hour, surely we may travel two, for no one will regard our example as of any authority, one way or the other.

I know it is easy for ministers who are in the

habit of going from home to exchange on the Sabbath to say, that there is an important distinction, whether worldly men will see it or not, and that they are not answerable for the influence of their example where the cases are so dissimilar. But are they sure that they are not answerable? This question ought to be settled in the affirmative beyond all doubt, before they 'lay the flattering unction to their souls.' What if some of their respective hearers should be emboldened and induced by their example, (improperly if you please,) to break the Sabbath, first by unnecessary travelling, and afterwards in various other ways, and should in consequence of it perish in their sins? Would these spiritual guides have nothing to answer for? I am sure it is not safe to venture upon such an issue.

But it is more than time to bring this long letter to a close. It appears to me, and I hope I have been enabled to show with some degree of success, that in all ordinary cases, ministers when they exchange, are bound by high and solemn considerations, to go before and return after the Sabbath. Only one word more. Let the brother with whom you exchange, occupy your study that he may be retired, and have no interruption from the family, and ask the same privilege for yourself. It is wrong to spend any part of holy time in miscellaneous and secular conversation, either at home or abroad.

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XXI.

MY DEAR E.

YOU are now not only an ordained preacher of the gospel, but the installed pastor of the second presbyterian church in L——. According to the original meaning of the term in the Old Testament, a pastor is a shepherd. A good shepherd not only ‘leads his sheep into green pastures,’ but watches over them to prevent their straying from the fold, and to protect them from the prowling wolf, and other beasts of prey. In the New Testament sense, a pastor is one who takes the religious oversight of a people to “feed them with knowledge and understanding,” and assumes the responsibility of watching over all their spiritual interests. While in the more limited sense of the term you are the pastor of the church in L——, in the popular sense you are pastor both of the church and congregation. Your pastoral duties extend to all who sit under your ministry and to all their families. You watch for the souls not of a part, but of the whole of your flock.

In laying so much stress as I have done, upon preaching, as the great business of your sacred calling, it has by no means been my intention to undervalue pastoral duties, or to intimate, that any amount of labor in the pulpit can release you from the prompt and active discharge of these duties. While you are

bound to teach your people publicly as a *minister*, you are equally bound to watch over them as a *pastor*. The proportion of time which should be devoted to each class of duties, will vary according to circumstances. But whatever the proportion may be in the study, in the pulpit and out of the pulpit, one class of duties is as imperative as another. You can no more excuse yourself from discharging the duties of a pastor, by pleading that you want all your time for study and preaching, than you can excuse yourself from preaching well studied sermons, by pleading that pastoral duties swallow up all your time. If it is your duty to preach well, it is equally your duty to be a faithful pastor. When the Good Shepherd ascended up on high, "leading captivity captive," "He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some *pastors* and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

Preaching is often so intermingled with pastoral duties, especially in times of revival, that it is impossible to separate them. Nor is it at all necessary for you to determine precisely, what is pastoral and what is ministerial. The great thing is, to "approve yourself unto God" in both these relations. But before I specify the more important of your pastoral duties, let me invite your attention to some of the essential qualifications for the proper discharge of these duties. This I shall do, for my own convenience and because I cannot do better, partly in the language of a discourse which I preached

before the Pastoral Association of Massachusetts in 1826.

And the *first* qualification which I shall mention is *sincere and elevated piety*. However men of evangelical views and principles may differ on some other points, they can have but one opinion here. Piety is the life and soul of pastoral fidelity. Without it every duty must be forced and heavy, if not positively irksome. For how can a pastor form any just estimate of the worth of the souls committed to his charge, if he has never deeply realized the value of his own? If the ‘love of Christ does not constrain him,’ what can hold him up and bear him on, through evil report, as well as good report, in the discharge of his duty? What else but eminent piety can sustain him, under the trials and discouragements which await him? What shall rouse him to action, when neither honor nor profit invites, and when “flesh and blood” shrink back—when all worldly motives conspire to discourage and impede him? If the love of God does not glow in his bosom, if an ardent love of souls is not there, what shall counteract the sluggishness of his own fallen nature, and induce him to follow his very enemies with prayers and entreaties, to the mouth of the pit, into which they are plunging?

Every pastor must be with the families of his flock, in sickness, danger and affliction. He must stand by the bedside, when flesh and heart are failing; when earth is receding, and the awful portals of eternity are opening. He must accompany many a trembling pilgrim to the entrance of the dark valley, and

as it were go down and dip his own feet in Jordan, while the dying, who cling to him, are torn from his side and sink in the cold flood. And how, if the standard of his piety is low and doubtful, can he be to them a ministering angel? How can he, with becoming earnestness recommend to them a Savior to whom he is himself all but a stranger, and point them to a heaven, which it requires a great stretch of charity to hope he will ever reach? How poorly, how miserably qualified is such a pastor, to visit "the widows and the fatherless in their affliction, and to comfort mourners in Zion."

Let me earnestly exhort you, my dear son, to "examine yourself;" to aim at a high standard of piety; to rest satisfied with no present attainments; to remember that your people look up to you, not only for counsel, but for large christian experience, and that without this experience you cannot discharge your duties with comfort to yourself, or advantage to them.

In the *second place*, a *deep and thorough knowledge of human nature* is essential to eminent usefulness in the pastoral office. Whatever a man's talents, or education, or piety even, may be, he will do but little good, and often a great deal of hurt in pastoral intercourse, if he is destitute of *common sense*, which is only another name for a knowledge of men and things, as they will be found in every congregation. However pure his notions may be, and whatever pains he may take to do good, he will often utterly fail, for want of the right tact. He will interest himself in things with which a minister ought never to meddle,

he will say things which he ought never to say, and remain silent when he ought to speak. He will be constantly mortified to find, that he has gone to work in the wrong way : and instead of gaining an influence with all classes in his congregation, he will create a general distrust of his judgment ; and every body will soon feel, that he has mistaken his calling. Like a stranger in a dark night, who hits every post that may happen to be in his way, and wounds himself continually with the sharp corners of things, he gets into trouble at every turn, and hardly ever knows how to get out.

You have had some advantages for studying human nature on both sides of the mountains ; and as you are older than most young men are when they settle, I hope you are not altogether deficient in this branch of knowledge. But you have yet much to learn. The volume which you have to study is a very large one. Some pages and chapters of it are hard to decipher ; and it would take you more than one life, fully to master it. Still, you may learn a great deal in a short time, by diligent application, and you want this knowledge for immediate and daily use. You must acquire it early, or you will find it impossible to go on ; for although every candid person will make some allowances at first, all will expect you to be an apt scholar ; and if you disappoint them here, you will soon lose your influence, however well you may preach. It would be scarcely hyperbolical to say, that your congregation is a world in miniature. It consists of the aged and the middle aged, of youth and children, of the rich and the poor, of the learned

and the ignorant, of the friends of God and of his enemies. It is certain, that you will have all the subtleties of human nature—all its wayward propensities—all its passions and appetites to deal with. How much wisdom then do you need, what an intimate knowledge of the windings of the human heart, to discharge aright your thousand duties.

Another essential pastoral qualification is *prudence*. Understand me, my son, by prudence I do not mean that time serving, earth-born policy, which is careful never to disquiet men's consciences ; which is so very polite and civil as never to use the word *hell*, without a humble apology, or to name the *prince of darkness*, without transforming him into a harmless eastern metaphor. Nor by prudence do I mean that cringing spirit, which never dares to look titled wickedness in the face—that aspen timidity, which always says “yes” to the world, whatever it may dictate or propose ; and which never troubles the gay, the rich, the great, or the polite, with any of the unwelcome and old fashioned topics of religion : or at any rate, not till they are just leaving the world, and want to be assured that such harmless and good hearted people as they are, have nothing to fear. All this and more which in some quarters passes current under the imposing garb of prudence, deserves a very different epithet.

Genuine ministerial prudence keeps back no important truth—listens to no compromise with sinners, connives at no fashionable vice—cringes before no lordly worldling—is never silent when it ought to speak—and never sits quaking in cowardly conceal-

ment, when the honor of religion calls for boldness and activity. But prudence is always the opposite of rashness and inconsideration. It neither speaks nor rests, till it has had time to think. In rebuking transgression, it strives to conciliate and gain over the offender. It disarms prejudice, inspires confidence, increases the number of friends and wards off the attacks of enemies. Ordinary talents, under the direction of prudence, will do more in the ministry than the greatest gifts without it. Indeed, without prudence, no pastor can long be either useful or happy. But I must not dwell any longer here.

In entering upon the "Pastoral care," the first thing is, to become acquainted with your flock. You went to L—— a perfect stranger; and though you have been some time in the place, it cannot be supposed that you have visited more than a few families, or that if you have just called upon a great many, you know very much about them. Let me advise you now, to take up the matter in earnest, and in a systematic way. I know it is an arduous undertaking. It will cost much time, which you will find it difficult to command just now, when your weekly preparations for the pulpit require you to be almost every day in your study. But you should "know the state of your flock," as soon as practicable. Till you do, you cannot adapt your preaching to their wants. You can preach the truth every Sabbath day, to be sure, and so can any stranger who happens to come into your pulpit. But this is shooting at random. No two congregations probably require the same course of preaching at any given time. What

is exactly suited to the circumstances of one, might be very inappropriate to the condition of another. And how are you to find out what your people most need? As but few of them will call on you at first, it can be done only by visiting their families. And when you have once entered upon the task, you will not find it so arduous, nor that it takes you off so much from your studies, as you may anticipate. You will commonly find, by dinner time, that you need the remainder of the day, either for relaxation, or for a change of employment; and you will often be rested in the afternoon and evening, by making those friendly calls, which people love to receive as soon as they can from their new pastor.

When you begin, take a memorandum along with you in your side pocket. Enquire after all the members of the family, and speak a few words, at least, to every one you find in the house, as well in the kitchen as the parlor. Put down the names and the number of the children. If anything uncommon arrests your attention, note it down for reference and for enquiry or action, as the case may be. If you adopt the course which I have recommended, and ever show me your book, I shall expect to find memoranda of this sort. "A. B., in such a poor family, is a remarkable boy. I must keep my eye on him. If here is a gem, as I think there is, it must be picked out of the rubbish and polished."

"D. N. appears to be pious, but to need instruction upon essential points. I must call again soon."

"I have seen a family to-day extremely poor, deplorably ignorant and I am afraid vicious. The fath-

er never attends church, though nominally with us, and the children have never been in a sabbath school in their lives. Something must be done at once. Such heathenism is a disgrace to a christian community."

"There is an aged widow in a garret, in such a street, waiting to be called home. I found her in my visits to-day, and it made my heart ache. Why is she there? Or at any rate why is she not made more comfortable? I find she is a member of our church. Her case must be immediately attended to."

"I have been greatly refreshed to-day, in conversing with an invalid in humble circumstances. Such patience, such humility, such faith, such consolations, such a hope! O it was good to be there, and I shall esteem it a great privilege to go often."

"D. A. is intelligent and accomplished and extremely friendly; but opposed to evangelical religion. He has been under bad influences, and has prejudices which must if possible be removed. The case demands prayer and effort."

I hope your first pastoral note book, will abound with such memoranda, whether I ever have the pleasure of looking it over or not. As your congregation is rather large, it may take you six months, or more, to visit every family; and when you commence, you will be apt, under the pressure of nameless other calls and duties, to be discouraged; but if you go by system, "redeeming the time," doing a little to day and a little to-morrow; and if you persevere from week to week and month to month, you will get round sooner than you expect. And when you have

completed this parochial census, you will not only be much better prepared to instruct and watch over your flock, but will feel yourself more than compensated for all your toil. When I settled in P——, where there had been a most unhappy division for seven years, and the two societies were just re-united, I spent the greater part of the first year, in making myself as thoroughly acquainted as I could with nearly the whole population ; and I found the advantage of it at every step and turn. It is true I was not a young man. I had spent ten years in another field of labor, and could of course command more time without endangering my public performances than you can. You will find no very serious difficulty, however, provided your health is good, in adopting and carrying out the plan which I have recommended, and having once gone over the whole ground, and taken all the important bearings and altitudes of things, you will feel a satisfaction and confidence in your subsequent labors, which no other beginning could impart. Those pastors, (I hope there are but few such,) who let the first year pass, and perhaps the second, without visiting all the families of their respective charges, lose vastly more in comfort and usefulness, than they are commonly aware of. It would trouble me exceedingly to hear that you are one of the number.

I am affectionately, &c.

LETTER XXII.

MY DEAR E.

HAVING in my last letter urged you to adopt a course of pastoral visiting, for the purpose of becoming personally acquainted with your congregation, within the shortest convenient time after your settlement, I may perhaps as well finish what I wish further to say upon this branch of duty, before I pass to other topics. However prompt you may be, in calling at every house in the beginning of your ministry, your people will not be satisfied with a single visit, and why should they? That acquaintance which ought to subsist between a pastor and all the members of his flock, cannot be forced in an interview of a few moments. If he makes the right impression on their minds, they will want to see him a second time more than they did the first. They may demand too much. This is not uncommon. But they have a right to expect, that besides visiting them in sickness and affliction, he will come to see them without being sent for, more or less frequently, as his health and other duties permit.

I will not undertake to say how often it may be a pastor's duty to make the circuit of his parish; for I do not think any general rule can be given. It must depend upon a great many circumstances, which are alike beyond human foresight and control. Undoubtedly it is very desirable that you should see all the

families of your charge, at least once a year ; and if you rightly estimate the good which you may do in this way, you will repeat your visits as often as you can. It would be unreasonable however, to require or to expect you to keep a register, and check every house you enter, and not to enter it again till you have gone round. Some are so near that you can drop in at any leisure moment, while it will require the best part of a day to visit others. It would be absurd to say, that a minister ought not to see his nearest neighbors any oftener than he does those who live many miles off. But if you are constrained to pass by any, for a much longer time than you could wish, let it be the rich, rather than the poor. The latter will lay anything like seeming neglect to heart, much more than the former. They need your sympathy vastly more ; and your advice too, on a great variety of subjects, which though not always strictly religious, are highly interesting and important to them.

In regard to the best mode of conducting pastoral visits, as I have already intimated, something like a plan or system has many advantages. If you content yourself with forming a general resolution to visit your people, whenever it shall be convenient, I am afraid you will make but little progress. There are so many petty thieves of time, that the convenient season will rarely come. You will be astonished to hear one and another say, “ it is now a year and a half, or two years, since we had the pleasure of seeing you at our house.” At first you will think it a mistake ; but a little reflection and enquiry will constrain you to admit, that if it is, the miscalcula-

tion is on your side and not theirs. You must be systematic. Pardon the repetition, you must be *systematic*, or you will often be mortified to find, that you have for a long time overlooked families, as much entitled to your pastoral regards as any other. I will not say, that a minister should never converse with his people upon the current topics of the day, when he calls to see them ; but this kind of friendly intercourse is not strictly speaking *pastoral*. It is not making those religious visits, which are so necessary in every congregation. And judging from my own experience, you will not unfrequently find it difficult to introduce the subject of religion, unless you let it be known beforehand, that this will be the sole object of your visit. If you call without any such notification, some of your good parishoners will have so many kind enquiries to make about your health, and your family, and your garden, and your last journey ; and so much to say about the heat and the cold, the quarreling and debating in Congress ; and the last news from Mexico, or China, or some other seat of war and revolution, that the hour will pass away, and the main object of your visit will be entirely frustrated. In order to carry religion into all the families of your charge, they must in some way be notified that you mean to spend particular days in such and such streets, or neighborhoods for the purpose. You may make these appointments publicly or privately, as you think best. When I was pastor of the church in F——, and also in P——, I often announced from the desk on the Sabbath, that I should visit such and such families on Tuesday, and

others on Wednesday, or Thursday, and so on from Sabbath to Sabbath : and I found it preferable to any other method I could adopt. Generally, they would make their arrangements to be at home ; whereas when I called without giving notice, some members of almost every family would be absent, and of course lose the visit. Were I to return to the “ Pastoral Care,” I think I should make my appointments publicly, and for another reason besides the one just offered. If you were to spend half your time in going from house to house, without saying anything about it, it would take you so long to visit all, that many would think you very remiss in this branch of pastoral duty. But when, from week to week, you publicly set apart several days or half days for visiting, and name the families to be called on, it teaches those who are most apt to complain of neglect, two things—that you do spend a great deal more time than they had supposed, and that it takes much longer to get round.

As the object of all your pastoral visits should be to do good, to carry the gospel in its simplest and most attractive forms into every dwelling, I trust you will habitually feel the importance of looking up to God, for wisdom to guide you, and for a right preparation of heart before you go out. Otherwise the duty will be extremely irksome to yourself and your visits will be less profitable to your people than they should be. In this familiar intercourse between minister and people, a great deal, I was going to say almost everything, depends on the *manner*. Religious topics may be introduced in a way so formal, stiff and awkward as

to send a chill to every heart, or they may be brought in so naturally and kindly, as to win the affections both of parents and children, and prepare the way for still more familiar intercourse, as opportunity may offer. When your own heart is full, you will be at no loss for words and thoughts. They will spontaneously gush out warm and sparkling as from an overflowing fountain, and will excite a sympathetic response in every bosom.

Let your pastoral visits be short and frequent, rather than long and far between. By coming directly to the point, you can say a great deal in a little time, and the impression is better when you seem to say too little than too much. While many of your remarks may be of a general nature, and addressed to all the adult members of a family indiscriminately, it is very desirable, that you should speak a few words at least to each individual, down to the youngest child that is capable of understanding the simplest elements of religious instruction. But in addressing parents on their appropriate fireside duties, and drawing out their religious opinions and feelings, you should rarely do it in presence of their children. Not one father in a hundred will be so free before his family, as in a private interview. It argues great want of judgment and discretion, when a pastor questions men much older than himself, in regard to their personal religion, before others. Many will resent it and resolve never to be catechised in the same way again, who would be quite willing to have a private interview with their minister, and might be greatly benefited by it. In general when you visit a

family, it will be very easy to see, not only the parents but all the adult inmates of the house alone, or to converse with each in so low a voice, as not to be heard across the room.

In ordinary times, you will not probably find many cases, as you go from house to house, requiring more attention than your other engagements will allow. But you will find some such every day that you are abroad amongst your people; and where you meet with them, you will see in a moment, that you must have more time for free personal conversation. You will accordingly call again very soon, when you have more time at command, or make an appointment to meet the individual at your own study.

Children, as well as adults, will expect you to notice them in all your pastoral visits, and will remember what you say longer than most of those who are much older. Their little minds are exceedingly susceptible of every impression, and if you address them with interest and affection, they will regard you with veneration and confidence, not only as their minister, but as their friend; and religious impressions may be made in the nursery, which will never wear out. You will find it very difficult to realize, when you hear their prattle, and almost have to stoop, to lay your hand upon their shining locks, that they will shortly be men and women, and constitute the most active part of your congregation. They will, however, soon push their parents off from the stage; and who knows but what the seed, which you thus early sow, will spring up in due time, and bear fruit an hundred fold? Catechise the children in every fam-

ily. It will do them good and their parents too. Hear their infant hymns and prayers, if they have learned and can repeat any, and if not, tell them how happy it will make you, to find them ready when you call again.

The advantages of pastoral visiting, when rightly conducted, are manifold and incalculable. It will keep you informed of the state and wants of your whole flock. A minister who has been settled two or three years in a town, ought to know the people better than any other man in it; and I am sure, no other man can turn his acquaintance to so good an account. I have already remarked in a former letter that half the interest of preaching, and more than half the profit, depends upon its being adapted to the ever varying circumstances of the congregation. Hence the vast importance of giving a *pastoral* complexion to all your practical sermons in your own pulpit. Hence also those pastors, who aim at this, commonly preach better at home than abroad—a most desirable excellence, and a sure pledge of great usefulness.

But the skill of making sermons eminently appropriate can never be acquired by a minister in his study. It is gained only by frequent and familiar intercourse with his people. Many a fine discourse is thrown away upon a drowsy congregation, simply because it is unseasonable; and it is unseasonable, because the preacher is ignorant of the state of his flock. In order, then, to do the most good by preaching, you must be an active pastor. You must learn from week to week, by personal intercourse with

your people, what instruction, warning, reproof or encouragement they need on the coming Sabbath. Nor should you, in ordinary cases, look upon any part of the time which you devote to pastoral visits, as so much taken from your weekly preparations for the pulpit. It must be your own fault, if every day you spend among your people does not furnish matter for one sermon at least.

Moreover, there is nothing like free and affectionate personal conversation to reach the heart and fill the church with attentive hearers. Almost every one can easily escape in a crowd, and hear for others rather than himself; but when he is personally addressed, he cannot help feeling that every word is meant for him; he is thus not only induced punctually to attend public worship, but also prepared by the grace of God "to receive with meekness the ingrafted word which is able to save his soul." In a word, though the active and faithful pastor has the keeping of no man's conscience, he has, what is far better, a place in a thousand hearts, and an intimate knowledge of the character, condition and wants of his people, which place him on the highest vantage ground for doing them good.

The collateral advantages of pastoral visiting are many and highly important. Wherever you go, there are bodies to be fed and clothed, and children to be educated and provided for, as well as souls to be saved; and it would be impossible to estimate the amount of good, which you may do in these respects, particularly to the poor of your flock. They need your counsel as well as your sympathy. By enquiring

into their circumstances, you can give them advice which is sure to be kindly received, and may often be better to them than direct pecuniary relief. You can aid them in getting work and finding good places for their children. If they are vicious, you can trace all their privations to the true source, and tenderly exhort them to "amend their ways and their doings," as the only way to obtain permanent relief. If they are sober and industrious, you can recommend them to the patronage and charities of the more wealthy families of your congregation. As it is known you have better opportunities than any other man, for acquainting yourself with the wants and afflictions of the lower classes, you will be expected more than any other man to bring their necessities before those who can help them. It pertains to your pastoral office; and if you rightly discharge the duty, the blessings of many who are ready to perish may come upon you. I do not know of a more interesting spectacle within a limited sphere, than to see an affectionate pastor moving about like some guardian angel among the poor and the ignorant of his flock, ministering to their necessities from his own scanty resources, trying to reclaim the idle and the vicious, encouraging the industrious, and making his benign influence felt throughout all their families.

I shall be told, no doubt, that where a congregation is large and scattered over a wide territory, it is impossible for a pastor to visit them as often as he could wish, and this is very true. But by system and perseverance he can do much every year. Nor let him, when he thinks how much time it takes to

visit the remotest families, forget that he often needs the exercise, and that exercise always does us more good, when we have an agreeable object in view, than when we ride or walk merely to escape the penalty of omitting it. If it should sometimes cost you a whole day and a ride on horse-back of twenty miles, to visit two or three families, it may be just the relaxation and fatigue, which you need to preserve your bodily health and your mental vigor.

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XXIII.

MY DEAR E.

I need not tell you, that visiting the sick is an essential branch of pastoral duty, nor that it is one of the most delicate and trying duties, you will be called upon to discharge. It is no less true of the sick than of the poor, that they are always with us. Were you to remain pastor of the church in L—— for half a century, there would probably be very few weeks during the whole period, in which none would need your sympathies and counsel on the bed of sickness. And however short may be your ministry, you must expect, not only that such calls will be frequent at all seasons of the year, but that there will be times when they will be exceedingly oppressive; seasons when you will want the best health, and “great grace” to sustain and direct you.

When you know that one of your church or congregation is seriously ill, do not wait to be sent for. Call at the house, if you do not remain five minutes. It may not be convenient for the sick man to see you just then; but it will show the interest you feel in him and the family, and will give them an opportunity to invite you to call again. Various causes may deter your people from sending for you, when their friends are taken down, till the case becomes critical or even hopeless. Knowing your many and pressing engagements, they may be unwilling to give you the

trouble. Or they may not be at all aware of any immediate danger, when the physicians are extremely anxious. Or they may feel afraid to have you see their sick friend, lest you should injure him. But when you go of your own accord, they will generally be glad to see you, and hardly ever close the door of the chamber against you. With very few exceptions, they will admit you, when none but the physician and the nurses are allowed to enter. Even where you know your visits are unwelcome, if there should be any such cases, and where you are put off with various excuses, let not this entirely discourage you. Call frequently, and repeat your friendly enquiries. It will do good. The veriest infidel in the land has no shield to ward off such kindness. A few days, even a few hours often work mighty changes. Your third or fourth visit may be very acceptable, may be even earnestly desired, when the first and second were anything but agreeable; and by seizing the favorable opportunity, you may, perhaps, "save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins."

It cannot indeed be expected, that you will immediately hear of every case of sickness in your large congregation, and of course you will often be sent for; but there is something altogether too cold, too *professional*, in waiting for a messenger, where you know a family is in distress.

Whenever you are sent for, in a case of extreme danger or of anxious enquiry, whether it be by day or by night, whether in storm or in sunshine, and you are able to go out, let nothing hinder you. It is a critical moment. The dying man will soon be in eternity.

If you wait for the day to break, or the tempest to cease, you may be too late. Were I writing letters to your people, as I am to you, I should undoubtedly warn them not to delay till the last hour, before they send for their pastor, if they would hope to have his visit do any good ; but I am now pointing out your duty, not theirs ; and whatever may be their neglects, it becomes you as a spiritual watchman, to hold yourself always ready at a moment's warning, and to do what you can, however late the call.

Long experience has convinced me, that much more depends upon the *manner* of entering a sick room, than young pastors in general are aware of. Always tread lightly upon the stairs which lead to the chamber. Open and shut the door softly. Approach the bed with a cheerful countenance. As the sick man extends his hand to welcome you, let him see and feel at once, that he grasps the hand of a friend. Speak to him in a low and soothing voice. Let every word fall as gently and kindly upon his ear, as the dew of Hermon. The sick often need encouragement, as well as instruction and prayer. In such cases, it has a bad effect for a minister to come in with the solemnity of death upon his countenance. It is calculated to excite alarm, and aggravate the disease ; and in no case, probably, does it do any good, to enter the chamber, as if you had come to read the patient's death-warrant. Whatever the danger may be, a mind overwhelmed with sudden terror is but poorly prepared to derive any advantage from the visit. Were I satisfied that he would not live an hour, and ever so much afraid that

he was unprepared to die, I would not virtually cut off that last hour of probation, by the abrupt and distracting announcement. Nor, on the other hand, would I conceal from him his imminent danger. I would talk to him as one on the brink of eternity, and urge him to "lay hold on the hope set before him" in the gospel, without a moment's delay. If, when you come to the dying sinner's bed side, you find him stupid, you must if possible sound a note of alarm deep enough to wake his slumbering conscience ; but let it at the same time be so affectionate, that he will love and thank you for your faithfulness. That is a cruel affection, which conceals from a friend, who is just leaving the world, his danger, or which cries "peace, peace, when there is no peace." If he listens, and the spirit of God sets his transgressions before him, beware that you do not encourage him to hope that his sins are pardoned, before he has cast himself upon the mercy of God, through a crucified Redeemer. Many, I fear, have been thus prematurely encouraged to their eternal undoing. The law was doing its work, and would soon have brought them to Christ, but for this ill-judged and fatal interference. If in any case you have as good evidence as the circumstances will allow, that a sinner has been brought to repentance at the very close of life, rejoice in it, but "rejoice with trembling." I fear that death-bed repentance is seldom genuine.

Some ministers have so many questions to ask the the sick, about the manner of their being taken down, the symptoms and medical treatment of their diseases, &c. &c., that there is little time left for any-

thing else. This, to make the best of it, argues more concern for their bodies, than for their souls. Always remember, my son, that you are not the *medical*, but the *spiritual* adviser ; and strive so to shape your conversation, as to make the best religious impressions in your power.

In the early stages of disease, and while the mind of the invalid is clear and active, you may labor with him on any point that seems to require it, at considerable length, always taking care however not to prolong the conversation beyond his ability to listen to advantage. As he grows weaker, your visits should be shortened, and you should select those topics which are most essential to immediate preparation for death, and which are most easily comprehended. When the patient is very low, when disease has apparently nearly done its work, and the mind sympathizes with the body in its extreme weakness, let your prayers be short and simple, and your words be few and directly to the purpose. It is cruel, under such circumstances, to give set dissertations, or to offer long prayers in the sick room ; and it does no good, but hurt. It exhausts without benefiting the sufferer. It is common for the sick to lose the power of attention, and even of comprehending any but the simplest truths.

While your heart will often ache as you stand by the sinner's dying bed, and know not what to say, you will also be called to witness the triumphs of faith, as the children of God gradually sink under the power of disease, and go down into the dark valley ; and this you should esteem as among your greatest privileges.

The chamber, where the good man meets his fate,
Is privileged beyond the common walk
Of *virtuous* life, quite in the verge of heaven.

If it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, how much more, to be admitted as a pastor into the chamber of the humble and joyful believer, who is waiting for his change, and whose triumphant song is, when flesh and heart are failing, "Thou, O Lord, art the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." What a privilege to minister to a soul, when it is pluming its wings for the paradise of God—to read and recite the great and precious promises to a beloved disciple, who is too weak to read them himself—to talk with an heir of heaven, day after day, when he is expecting his Savior to come and receive his departing spirit, and to hear him sing as he departs, "O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory!" O my son, to enjoy one such scene is worth years of toil in our Master's vineyard. Let me exhort you, to spend as much time with the eminently pious members of your church, when they are sick, as you can command, and as their waning strength will bear. If your own spirit is in a right frame, you cannot spend it more profitably. It will make you a better man and a better minister, as long as you live.

One word more before I close this letter. Make it a general rule to visit the sick in the early part of the day. They are then better able to see you and to enjoy your visit, than in the afternoon or evening. Indeed you should rarely call in the evening, and never at a late hour unless you are sent for. When

I mention the forepart of the day, however, as the best time, I do not mean early in the morning. This would be no less unseasonable than late at night. If I may venture to be so particular, from ten to twelve o'clock is the most favorable part of the twenty-four hours.

I am affectionately, &c.

LETTER XXIV.

MY DEAR E.

As death is one of the very few certainties to which a minister can look forward among his people, when he is ordained, and as you will every year be called on to bury many of your congregation, I shall devote this letter to the subject of *funerals*.

And my *first* remark is, that I hope you will use your influence against unnecessarily appointing them on the Sabbath. I do not know how it is in L——, but in some places there are many more burials on the Lord's day, than on any other day of the week. This may be owing, in part, to an impression, that the sanctity of the day somehow sanctifies the funeral services; but I think the main reason is, that people are more at leisure to attend on that day, than on any other, and that many consider it is a saving of time, to do up as much of this business as they can, before the secular labors of the week are begun, or rather after they are finished. In some cases too, a desire to have a large funeral may have its influence upon the families and friends of the deceased, in selecting the Sabbath, when either Saturday or Monday would have answered just as well. But whatever the cause or causes may be, it would be easy to show, that the practice is liable to many serious objections. Some of these it will be directly in my way to urge, should I live to address a series

of letters to the churches and congregations, with which I was once so happily connected. At present, I shall only say, that as the ordinary labors of the Sabbath will commonly demand all your strength, and as funerals can rarely be attended without a considerable addition to these labors, the proper care of your health requires you to postpone them if you can. In some cases, I know, the burial services can neither be hastened nor put off. It is proper, on every account, that they should be attended on the Sabbath, and you should by no means shrink from the duty. But when there is no necessity for it; when the funeral might just as well be attended on Saturday, or put off till Monday, you may with great propriety recommend and request it.

It is the custom, in some places, to require *funeral sermons* not only for adults but for children also: and in large congregations, this custom is extremely onerous upon the ministry. It is not very uncommon for a pastor to have thirty or forty funerals during a year in his own parish, besides many others out of it. Now to prepare and preach as many discourses as there are deaths, happening, as they often do, when a minister has more on his hands than he can accomplish, or when he is already worn down with labor, is a great task. And why should such a burden be imposed, especially upon a young man? Are the advantages of preaching, in every house of mourning, so great, that you ought cheerfully to perform the labor, even though it should interfere with other duties, or press you harder than you can safely bear? Certainly there are no occasions which bring us so

near the eternal world, as when we meet to bury our friends and neighbors, and we literally stand upon the side of the open grave. Every such occasion, no doubt, calls for appropriate religious services. It does not follow, however, that there should always be a sermon. Circumstances *may* be such, that it could scarcely be omitted, without a manifest loss of the right impression. My own view of the case is, (and such has been my practice,) that it is best on some striking occasions to preach, in the church, or at the house of the deceased. But I do not think, that if you were ever so well able to prepare and deliver a suitable discourse, whenever a death occurs in your congregation, it would be profitable. There must, after a little while, be a great sameness in the topics and thoughts, if not in the language also. In spite of your best efforts to give variety to your funeral discourses, they would ere long become like a mournful tale, which has so often been told, as to lose its effect. A better way, it seems to me, is, at the interment of children, and ordinarily of adults, to read a suitable portion of scripture, and to follow the reading with an appropriate address of a few minutes, or half an hour, according to circumstances. I should be sorry to have you ever attend a funeral, without availing yourself of the opportunity to impress truth upon the minds of the living, in a few words at least; and there will doubtless be favorable opportunities, for bringing the awful realities of death, judgment and eternity to bear upon individuals, who never attend church, and whom you can never hope to reach at any other time.

When these opportunities arise, as they may, within a stone's throw of your church, or as they are more likely to occur, in remote districts of your parish, I would advise you to make the most of them. Many of the individuals, who have been drawn together by relationship to the afflicted family, or by other accidental causes, you may never see again, till you meet them at the judgment; and who can tell, but that the Holy Spirit may apply the truth to some of their consciences, and they may be saved?

I meant to have said a few words upon giving *characters* at funerals. This is treading upon very delicate ground. Now and then a case will occur, in which you can do it with entire safety. The character may be so faultless, and the individual may have been so universally beloved, that an extended enumeration of his virtues may find a response in every bosom. These however are the exceptions. Most men are too imperfect to be held up as models even in that hour when their virtues are most vividly remembered. And when you have once begun to praise the dead, where will you stop? Every body will, ere long, expect something like a funeral eulogy, when a friend is taken away; many will be very much dissatisfied if you fall below their estimate of his character, and since it will often be impossible for you to come up to it with a clear conscience, why not in most cases be silent? Say what you will, "you cannot make one hair white or black"—you cannot alter the condition of the dead. It is too late. Their account is sealed up to the day of judgment. The decision is already made for

eternity. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still : and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still : and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still : and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

But the greatest objection to giving characters, except in cases of decided and eminent piety, lies in the injury which it may do to the living. Whenever you attempt it, you will feel constrained to make the sketch as flattering as you can, and will be very apt to leave the impression, that you hope it is well with them, though they made no profession of religion, and though it is generally understood, that to the last there was no evidence of any great moral change in their views or feelings. If at their funerals you virtually send them to heaven, either in your sermons or your prayers, their unconverted acquaintances will infer, that they too may expect a similar passport, should you ever be called to bury them.

I know how hard it is, when a circle of mourners are bowed down into the dust, and your sympathies are strongly excited, I say I know how hard it is in such cases, to refrain from offering them those consolations, which are drawn from the hope, that their departed friend has entered into his eternal rest, when you can see no scriptural ground for such a hope. But severe as the trial must be to you and to them, how much better to endure and to inflict the pain, than to "go beyond the word of the Lord to say less or more." While on the one hand it would, in all ordinary cases, be cruel to aggravate their afflictions, by telling that in your opinion there is no hope, it would be wrong on the other to hold up en-

couragement, which the Bible does not warrant. The safest and best way is, to leave the dead with "the Judge of all the earth, who will do right," and faithfully to instruct and warn the living.

Should you enquire of me here, whether it is ever right and expedient, in attending the funeral of a notoriously wicked man, to tell the people you have no doubt that he has gone down to the world of despair, my answer would be, you have asked a hard question. The man, perhaps, died in his bed with curses upon his lips, or he was found dead in the gutter, with his rum bottle by his side, or he was a ringleader of the ungodly, and perished by their hands in their last deadly affray, and you are called to attend his funeral. Some of his companions and others of the worst class in society are there. In what manner is it your duty to address them? What ought you to say of the deceased? If respectable family connections are present, some regard should certainly be had to their feelings. It would be wrong to inflict the torture upon them, unless ministerial fidelity clearly requires it. But I can conceive of cases, in which, where there are neither parents, wife, children, brothers or sisters to be wounded by it, it may be your duty in addressing his companions to say, that such was his character, you have no hope of him, and to beseech them not to plunge into the same place of torment. I recollect more than one instance of the kind, when I felt constrained to come out plainly, and point to the lifeless remains of the drunkard and the suicide, as awful examples of manifest and final reprobation. Having asked wisdom of God,

you must judge and act in each case according to circumstances, and may he put such words into your mouth as will be most for his glory, and for the good of "them that hear you."

Ministers are very apt to make their funeral services too long. They reflect too little upon the convenience and health of those who attend. In many cases there is not room in the house to receive them. Some must remain outside, and listen as well as they can at the doors and windows. This, except in very mild and pleasant weather, is an exposure which should not be unnecessarily prolonged. And where there is room for all within, the majority cannot be seated. The doors are open. The cold air rushes in. All feel it, and few would, under other circumstances, think their health safe for a quarter of an hour. Its being a funeral occasion will not protect them. They are yet in the body. If you make a long address; if you pray thirty or forty minutes; if you protract the discomfort and exposure for an hour, or an hour and a quarter, you forget that however "willing the spirit may be, the flesh is weak." Let your prayers be of moderate length, comprehensive and appropriate. To this end, make yourself familiar with such portions of scripture, as the seventh, and the fourteenth chapters of Job, the eighty-eighth, ninetieth, and hundred and third Psalm, and the fifteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians. Store your memory with such passages from all parts of the Bible, as you will have occasion to use in your funeral prayers. Nothing will enrich

them like it. No words which you can command will be half so appropriate, or half so touching.

Be punctual to the hour on funeral occasions, as well as all others, and commence as near the time as you can. Why should you incommode those that come early, by waiting for such as are always behind the time? If it would do any good, you might conform to their dilatory habits once or twice; but it would only serve to strengthen them. Your own example, and such reasons for punctuality as you may occasionally suggest, will soon correct any tardiness, of which you may at first have cause to complain.

Never permit the people to stand long upon the cold and damp ground by the side of the grave, for the sake of singing a hymn, or seeing the sexton finish his melancholy task. Life and health are too precious to be sacrificed, where no possible advantage to the dead can be gained by it. Many, I doubt not, have, by lingering in the graveyard, prepared the way for being soon brought back by their mourning families and sympathizing neighbors.

There is hardly any point pertaining to the care of health, on which people at large stand in more need of caution, than this of attending funerals, particularly in wet and inclement weather. This being the case, ministers cannot too earnestly advise them to use double care in protecting themselves with warm clothing, and guarding carefully against exposure at the house, on the way to the grave, while in the yard, and when returning to their homes.

Nor should you forget the care of your own health, on these occasions. Avoid standing in a cur-

rent of air, when you perform the services. Lay off your outer garments. Never, if you can help it, go out in a perspiration, when the procession moves from the house. If you are exhausted, and the way is long, and the air is piercing or chilly, beg your friends to excuse you on account of the exposure, and they will cheerfully do it. Gratifying as it might be to all the bereaved, to have you go and return with them, few will desire it, when you cannot gratify them with safety to yourself.

I have given you no advice as yet, about attending funerals out of your own congregation. In some places a large part of the population are attached to no religious society whatever ; and more or less of this class may be found almost every where. They die however like other men, and when they die they must be buried. In almost every case a clergyman will be sent for, if one is at hand ; for, however thousands may live without the forms of religion, very few are willing to see their friends laid in the grave without them. You will often be sent for by persons, whom you do not know, whom you have never seen perhaps ; and when you take one view of the case, it may seem like laying a great and unreasonable burden upon your shoulders. But when you take another view of it, you will be thankful for these opportunities of doing good, which nothing but the ravages of death could ever give you. When the friends of a deceased parent, or husband, or wife, or child, who rarely if ever hear the gospel, send for you, they put themselves entirely in your power. They give you every advantage you could desire, to

address them and others like them, who may happen to be present, on the worth and care of their souls, and when they may be expected, if ever, to listen candidly to the truth. Who can tell but that some of them may be "pricked in the heart," as the murderers of Christ were on the day of Pentecost? Thousands, who had lived like heathen, till the king of terrors entered their families, have by his visits been first brought acquainted with the ministers of Christ, have had their prejudices removed and their hearts opened, and have been induced to become regular worshippers in the house of the Lord. I can hardly entertain a doubt, that if you go in his strength, whenever you are sent for, and not imperiously hindered by paramount duties at home, some, at least, will become interested in you as a man and a preacher; will enquire for your church, attend on your ministry, be converted from "the error of their ways," and made "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." How animating the thought! Who would not be willing to hold himself ready at the call of the irreligious and the ignorant, for the sake of enjoying such opportunities to "turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God?"

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XXV.

MY DEAR E.

NEXT to the *sick*, the *afflicted* of your congregation will have the strongest claims upon your pastoral sympathies and advice. As surely as "man goeth to his long home, do the mourners go about the streets." The badges of mourning will always be before your eyes on the Sabbath. Ere they are laid aside by one family, they will be put on by another. Though you were to live and preach half a century, the fountain of tears would never be dried up. Look round upon your flock when you will, there will be those present who have just buried some dear friend, and who are bemoaning themselves daily in secret places. "My soul is full of troubles. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me. Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction. Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee? Lord, why castest thou off my soul? Why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die, from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off. They come round about me daily like waters; they compassed me about together. Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness. Deep calleth unto deep, at the noise

of thy water-spouts : all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.”

The afflicted, to whom you will be called to administer the consolations of religion, will be of all classes, ages and conditions in life—the rich and the poor, the young and the old, parents and children, the widow and the fatherless. And they will differ as much in their characters, as they do in their ages and outward circumstances. Some of them will be God’s dear children, and while they smart under his chastening rod, will have grace given them to say with Job, “the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” Others, whose piety cannot reasonably be questioned, you will find “so troubled that they cannot look up,” and rather trying to be resigned to the will of God, than prepared to say, “It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.” Others you will find shut up in their dark chambers, strangers to the hopes and consolations of the gospel, and refusing to be comforted. Some will weep their eyes away over their crushed and buried hopes, and others will sit down in a kind of sullen resentment against God, for taking away their idols. If they do not curse him with their lips, you will see at a glance, that their hearts are quite as full of rebellion as of sorrow. Here you will find an aged pair mourning over the early death of a son, who was their only earthly prop ; and in another part of the town you will find grief, too big for utterance, brooding over the tragical end of a profligate child. In one street, as you enter the house, the stifled sighs of the widow, and the loud sobs of her

fatherless children will strike your ears, and in another, you will find yourself surrounded by weeping orphans, who have neither father nor mother left to comfort them.

Does the bare thought of scenes like these make you sad? Do you shrink back from these mournful offices? Are you ready to exclaim, "O Lord, I cannot speak, for I am a child?" You will often feel as if you could not go to the house of mourning, and when you arrive there, you will sometimes find such deep and inconsolable affliction, that you will not know what to say. I can enter into your feelings perfectly. I have in many instances remained silent for a long time, under the most painful consciousness, that whatever sympathies I might attempt to offer would come so far short of what the stricken heart needed, as to be offered utterly in vain. I know of no better rule in such trying cases than to follow the promptings of nature. When Job's three friends met at his house, "to mourn with him and comfort him," instead of addressing him, as they had intended, they lifted up their voices and wept, and "sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him, for they saw that his grief was very great." This was nature; and like the friends of Job, you can weep with the afflicted, if you cannot comfort them. Mingling your tears with theirs will touch their hearts, when the kindest words would but aggravate their distress, and will prepare the way for whatever condolence, advice, or instruction they may afterwards require.

The best preparation you can make for visiting the

afflicted is, to store your memory with appropriate passages of Scripture, that you may "give to every one a portion in due season;" and by prayer, to get your own heart into a right frame before you go. A few minutes spent in your closet, or in ejaculatory prayer on the way, will help you exceedingly. The main difficulty, except in such extreme cases as I have above alluded to, arises from want of preparation on the part of the pastor himself. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." You will rarely want for words, if your heart is full. And here let me advise you, always to keep suitable tracts by you, that, when you go to the house of mourning, you may select one or more to carry along, and leave with the family. If this were done by every pastor, I have no doubt thousands would be comforted and savingly benefited by these little unpretending messengers of consolation. There are many small volumes also, written on purpose for mourners, with which you should acquaint yourself, and which you should recommend to your people, where you think they are needed. Reading passages from them as well as from the Scriptures, or referring to them, when they are not at hand, will often suggest interesting trains of remark, where you would otherwise be at a loss for the most suitable topics.

Sometimes, when you might find enough to say, it will be your privilege to sit still and listen to the outpourings of pious resignation from the stricken heart of the chastened believer. You will then be the learner, and not the teacher, and will have the greatest occasion, when you retire, to bless God for

putting you into such a school, and giving you so rich a lesson. It may humble you to see how far inferior your own attainments in the divine life are; and this will be a great blessing. It was, if I remember right, a remark of Dr. Backus, afterwards President of Hamilton College, that he never felt so small in his life, as he did in the presence of an aged widow, who had just lost her only son, on whom she was entirely dependent. Her pastor went to comfort her, expecting to find her crushed by the sudden stroke. But he found her so calm, so cheerful, so resigned, so confiding, so heavenly-minded, that he could scarcely open his mouth. "I find," said she, "that God requires *all* my heart, and I am determined he shall have it." Such a privilege, should you ever be permitted to enjoy it, will compensate you for a thousand painful interviews with mourners of an entirely different class.

Sometimes you will find the children of God ready to sink under his chastising hand, and crying out, with the man of Uz in his great spiritual conflict, "O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come unto his sanctuary. Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him." In such cases you will quote the promises. You will pour the balm of consolation into the heart of the afflicted and desponding believer. You will exhort him to rise and shake himself from the dust, and to sing with the Psalmist, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, why art thou

disquieted within me? Hope thou in God for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance." You will remind him that, "like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

Sometimes, and I fear oftener than otherwise, you will find the mourners of your congregation, "strangers to the covenants of promise." You cannot point them to the consolations of religion; for they have never "tasted that the Lord is gracious." You cannot address them as children smarting under the rod of their heavenly Father; for they have never learned to look up with filial confidence and say, "Our Father, who art in heaven." You cannot comfort them with his great and precious promises; for these are addressed to none but "mourners in Zion." But you can sympathize with them. You can instruct them. You can tell them, where alone the afflicted find true consolation, and who it is that binds up the broken hearted. You can vindicate the ways of God to man; can show that what he gives, he has a perfect right to take away; that he doth not willingly afflict and grieve the children of men;" that he is as it were constrained to do it, to arrest them in their thoughtless career, and bring them to repentance, and that afflictions, when rightly improved, are blessings in disguise. You can affectionately exhort the bereaved, who have no faith, no grace, no hope to support them, to "hear the rod, and who hath appointed it;" to listen when the voice cries, "be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man

cometh;" and to see to it that they get ready to follow those, whose departure they mourn, to the bar of God. You can tell them that if afflictions do not soften, they harden the heart, and that you cannot but tremble for them, more than ever, if after all they should go their way, and forget that they too must die. On topics like these you can safely dwell, and let me exhort you to be faithful as one who must give account. And do not content yourself, with calling once, after public prayers have been requested in compliance with the general custom, but repeat your visits, and follow up every good impression, which may have been made, with fervent prayer to God, that it may be deepened into conviction, and issue in saving conversion. I fear, there is in general a great want of pastoral faithfulness in this particular. Those who are alarmed by the death of their friends are left to sink back into their former stupidity, when by the blessing of God upon repeated visits and conversations, they might have been induced, "to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling?"

There is one other class of mourners, which you may be called to visit, and with whom you should be prepared tenderly and solemnly to expostulate. I allude to such as actually murmur and rebel under the rod. I have heard a person of this class say, "I do not know what I have done, that God should afflict me so often, and so much more than he does others." What was this but making the charge of injustice and partiality against the Judge of all the earth, and what was the proper answer? "You do not know

what you have done ! I am amazed. I am confounded. What have you not done to wear out his patience, and bring down his holy displeasure ? Tell me the day of your life, in which you have not broken his holy law, and been unthankful for his mercies. You make me shudder. “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee.”

Should you, my dear son, ever be brought into similar circumstances, may God give you grace to be faithful, and in all other cases where, though the lips may not express it, you find reason to believe that secret murmurings are indulged in the heart.

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XXVI.

MY DEAR E.

THE catalogue of your *pastoral* duties is not completed. You might visit every family in your congregation, once a year, or oftener ; you might be unwearied in your attentions to the sick and the afflicted, and yet not be a good pastor—not properly fill your important station. Always bear it in mind, that more than one half your flock are under twenty years of age, and that the tenderest care of a shepherd is, to gather and feed the lambs. It is your duty, and if you discharge it faithfully, it will be your greatest pleasure, to superintend the religious education of the children and youth of your pastoral charge. While you are preaching to them as part of the congregation from Sabbath to Sabbath, and sometimes writing sermons on purpose for them, much more will remain to be done. The children must be brought nearer, and addressed in a more familiar style, than they can ordinarily be from the pulpit. The truth must be presented in its more simple and elementary forms. You must gather the little ones about you, and break up the bread of life into small portions, as they can receive it.

In the first place, then, let me charge you to *catechise* them. This you may do, both on the Sabbath, and on week days ; and I would advise you to do it *systematically*. Whatever method you adopt, form

your plan, and announce it from the pulpit. Let your people understand, that it is your intention to meet the children statedly, at such times and places as you specify, and that you rely upon the co-operation of parents, to aid you in securing their punctual attendance. I would recommend *neighborhood catechising*, because it will sometimes be inconvenient and even impossible for all the children to come together in one place ; and they ought none of them to lose the benefit of this exercise. But you should by all means have set times for catechising them together on the Sabbath. I confess I feel a great partiality for the sanctuary, as the most proper place. Perhaps it is because, when I was pastor, I was in the habit of bringing the children for the same purpose into the body pews, several times in a year, after the regular services of the Lord's day. I know not how much of mere feeling there may have been in it, but there was always to me a sacredness in the associations of the place, which added much to the interest and solemnity of the exercise. There I had baptized many of them in the name of the Holy Trinity ; there they were accustomed to listen to me from the pulpit, and there most of the parents would remain in the side pews, to hear what I had to say. This last circumstance gave me a fine opportunity of saying many things to fathers and mothers through their children, which I could scarcely have said with equal advantage elsewhere. If this hint should strike you favorably, I hope that wherever you collect the children of your congregation to catechise them, you will induce as many of

their parents to attend as you can. Generally make the exercise short ; or rather, contrive to make it so interesting, that the time may seem much shorter than it really is. This will make both parents and children anxious to come again.

If children are catechised, they must have catechisms selected for them, and must commit them to memory. Quite young children want something more simple, than those who are a few years older. But I think the fault of the present age is, to simplify too much ; or at any rate, to confine the child too long to the mere elements of things. The order of nature is to advance, to expand, to "leave the things that are behind," and "go on unto perfection." As yours is a presbyterian church, I take it for granted, you will use the Assembly's Shorter Catechism for the older children, whatever more simple questions and answers you may select for the younger. This catechism is an incomparable summary of "sound doctrine," and the objection that children cannot understand it will weigh but little with any one, who believes that their memories ought to be early stored with clear statements and accurate definitions. No theory of early religious education can be more erroneous, than that which would withhold from children every thing which cannot at the time be perfectly understood. I might confidently appeal to the experience of all who have enjoyed the advantages of early religious instruction, and profited most by it, that much, which the child cannot fully comprehend, furnishes, by being laid up in his

memory, the richest materials for intellectual and moral improvement in after life.

I must be allowed to add, that very much will depend upon the *manner* in which you conduct your catechetical exercises. Were you to content yourself with asking the naked questions, as they occur in their order, and receiving the answers, however correctly committed by the children, you would but very imperfectly discharge your duty. Almost any one of them might take the catechism, and do the same. You are their pastor; their religious guide and teacher. To you they have been taught to look for instruction. Their bright eyes are upon you; their little ears are open; their young hearts are tender. You ought therefore to prepare yourself thoroughly for the exercise; to enter into it with all your heart; to ask a hundred questions growing out of the lesson; to explain, to simplify, to illustrate; and in one word, to pour in as much truth as can be profitably received. In this way you will keep up a most interesting acquaintance with the rising hopes of your congregation; will gain the love and confidence of your infant charge, and will be able to sow much precious seed, which by divine refreshing may spring up and bring forth, "some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred fold."

In the next place, let the *sabbath school* receive a large share of your pastoral attention. I know you cannot take it upon your own shoulders. It will not be expected. The burden would be too heavy. You cannot be a regular teacher, nor the immediate and responsible superintendent. Your public labors

on the Sabbath will not ordinarily leave you either time or strength for the service. But, my dear E., you must do a great deal, in one way and another, or your school will not prosper. You must, unless you are more highly favored than most pastors are, be the life and soul of it, or it will have but little efficiency. You must prepare the machinery and move the wheels, if you do not perform the work. I hope you have some first rate men in your church, with whom you can advise, and who will be ready to second you in all your plans and efforts. But they will look to you to move first. It is best they should. There must be a central power somewhere. There must be a head. The duty properly devolves upon the pastor to take the lead, and he must not decline it. In order to bring the importance of sabbath school instruction before the whole congregation, you must preach on the subject. You must point out its advantages. You must urge upon those who are competent, and who may be applied to as teachers, the duty of enlisting in the great and good work, and exhort parents of every class to send their children seasonably and steadily. You must, with the best advice you can obtain, select the teachers, and secure as many consistent, well informed, and devoted christians as possible. If a sufficient number of professing christians competent to the task cannot be found, then others of sober minds and unblemished morals must be enlisted ; but I hardly need to add, that no individual should ever be applied to, or received as a teacher, whose moral character is at all doubtful.

Though you cannot take charge of the school yourself, you can meet the teachers once a month, or oftener, to hear their reports, to ask their opinions upon the merits and defects of text books, and the best methods of instruction ; to discuss and answer questions, and to give them familiar lectures upon such topics as you judge will be most interesting and profitable.

Let me earnestly advise you also, to meet the teachers every week, when it is practicable, and go over the lesson with them carefully before it is recited. This will give them opportunity to hear your explanations and practical remarks, to propose their difficulties if they have any, and will be a better safeguard than any other, against erroneous expositions of scripture, and those discrepancies of instruction which are liable to creep into the best regulated school. I do not know how you can spend an hour in the week to better advantage. If the teacher alone were to be instructed and benefited by it, no good pastor would grudge the time or the trouble. How much less, when you consider, that through the teachers, and without any further toil, you are communicating religious knowledge to all the children of your congregation.

Let me advise you, moreover, to keep your eye, as it were, always upon the school, though you should rarely be present through the exercises. It will task your strength but a little, when you come down from the pulpit, to say a few words to the children, and open with a short prayer. You can also frequently step in a few moments, before the public service be

gins, and when you have help, you can spend more time, going round from pew to pew, listening to some of the recitations, and dropping a word here and there, for the encouragement both of teacher and pupils. They will love to see you.

If there should be any occasion for it, give your advice in regard to the ordinary length of the exercise. When we consider, that the teachers and most of the children attend two public services on the same day, there is more danger of making the Sabbath school too long than too short. There is danger from too long confinement and too great fatigue. The health, particularly of female teachers, is liable to be impaired by it. Young children cannot sit still so long as older persons, and we all know that even adults cannot profit under the best instruction, when the confinement becomes irksome.

A high responsibility will devolve upon you in the choice of *text books*. There are so many now in use, that it will take up some of your time to examine and compare them, and you are bound, as a faithful pastor, to see to it, that nothing is introduced, which militates against the system of divine truth which is taught in your Confession of faith, and which is the basis of all your preaching. Woe to the church, where the weekly ministrations of the pastor are counteracted and undermined in the Sabbath school. "A house that is divided against itself cannot stand."

One suggestion more, and I will pass on to other topics. It will require a good deal of time and perseverance, to hunt up all the children in the by ways,

that ought to be brought into your Sabbath school, and to induce their parents to send them. Some of this labor will devolve upon you. The teachers cannot do it all. They will want your influence, which when personally exerted, will do more than that of any other man. The poor and the ignorant will have their difficulties and objections. Their children have no decent clothes they have no books, &c. &c., These difficulties are easily surmounted. They can be clothed, books can be given them, their reluctance can be overcome, and it will depend very much upon your personal agency, how many of them shall be brought into the school, and rescued from the filth and ignorance and vice, in which they were perishing. What you cannot do yourself to make them decent and comfortable, you can induce others to do, and thus by the grace of God many of them may be saved.

From the *Sabbath school*, the way is short and plain to the *Bible class*. If it is your duty to catechise the children of your congregation, and to see that they are well taught in the Sabbath school room, it is no less so, familiarly to instruct the young people in the doctrines and duties of our holy religion, in the Bible class. To do justice to this branch of the "Pastoral Care" would require a volume, instead of a few hints at the close of a letter. In some of the rural congregations of New England, the greater part of the adults, who attend public worship, are in the habit of forming themselves into classes during the intermission, for mutual instruction in the word of God ; and it is one of the most delightful spectacles

that I ever witnessed. In these classes, those who are the best qualified are expected to take the lead. Perhaps you remember an aged and pious aunt of mine, in the town where our family originated. When she was a "widow" of more than "fourscore years," she might be seen every Sabbath at the head of her class, consisting of "mothers in Israel," some of whom were nearly as old as herself! Where this custom prevails, it is not expected that the pastors will regularly teach any of the classes; though it is exceedingly gratifying to see them occasionally moving about from one part of the house to another, and to unite with them as they offer prayer for the blessing of God upon this method of studying the Scriptures.

Such Bible classes as a pastor is expected to organize and instruct, are composed chiefly, if not exclusively, of the young; and in most parts of the land, certainly in our own denomination, the minister would be thought extremely delinquent, who should not have one or more of these classes always under his care. I have no very definite plan to propose for your adoption, either in organizing or teaching such classes. The more common way is, to invite the young people of both sexes to meet their pastor statedly for religious instruction. Another method is, to meet the two sexes separately. I have tried both, and each has its peculiar advantages. I have reason to believe that I never did more good in this department of pastoral labor, than in a class of young ladies at P——, where I passed the most eventful years of my ministry. I cannot say how

others may view the subject, but as far as I may be allowed to judge from my own experience, it is better occasionally to change from one form of organization to another, than to adhere exclusively to any. The young are fond of variety, and it is often wise to gratify them.

The same remark holds true, in regard to *modes of teaching*. Though your object ought always to be the same, viz. the religious instruction, awakening and conversion of your youthful charge, no exclusive method of bringing the truth to bear upon their minds is prescribed in the Scriptures. This year you may take up the shorter, or the larger catechism, giving out one or more questions for each lesson, requiring the class to study the answers thoroughly, and to look out the references. The grand aim of this exercise should be to *indoctrinate* them—not to dictate what they shall believe—not to intrench in the slightest degree upon the sacred right of private judgment, but to induce them to search the Scriptures for themselves, that they may be early “rooted and grounded in the truth.” The next year you may, if you think it expedient, vary the exercise a little, by giving out questions, referring to authorities, and appointing a certain number of the class to bring in written dissertations, or leaving it optional with such as may choose to write. I once tried this method for a few months with considerable advantage. It elicits the views of the older and more intelligent members of the class; wakes up a new interest in the minds of all, and affords you an excellent opportunity, in summing up, to enlarge upon the difficult

parts of the subject, obviate objections, and settle fundamental principles. Another method is, to take up a Gospel or an Epistle, give out a chapter or part of a chapter for a lesson, and pursue this course till the book is finished. By preparing yourself for a critical and practical exposition of each lesson before it is dismissed, you will secure the double advantage of enriching your own mind with divine knowledge, and imparting it to the juvenile members of your church and congregation. I might easily enlarge on this head, and recommend other methods of imparting Bible instruction to your classes ; but your own good judgment enlightened by experience will suggest them.

There are then, my dear E., as we have seen, *three* nurseries of the church, the family, the Sabbath school, and the Bible class, on which you should keep your eye and the care of which, will either mediately or immediately devolve upon you as the pastor. If you are faithful and God adds his blessing, though you should not live to gather the full harvest, some other man will no doubt enter into your labors, and reap it after you, that “both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.”

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XXVII.

MY DEAR E.

ALLOW me once more to remind you, that although the care of the whole congregation was committed to you, when you was ordained, you are especially to consider yourself as the pastor of the *church*. There is a sacredness in this latter relation, which does not pertain to the former. The Pastoral Care is an office divinely constituted "for the edification of the body of Christ, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." That tender charge of the "good shepherd," "Feed my sheep—Feed my lambs," is full of meaning; and the flock which he has given you to watch over, as an under shepherd, will need your constant care and vigilance. It is a howling wilderness through which you are to lead them, into those "sweet fields, that lie beyond the swelling flood." You are to guard them, not only against the "wiles of the devil, who as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour," but against "wolves in sheep's clothing;" those false teachers who, "if it were possible, would deceive the very elect." "Of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women, laden with sins, led away with divers lusts; ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

I know that if "the enemy should come in like a flood," you cannot meet him at every assailable point,

for his "name is legion," and your master will never require impossibilities. But if, through your remissness, the hedges of the vineyard should be broken down, and "the boar out of the wood should waste it, and the wild beast of the field should devour it"—if while you sleep the enemy should come and sow tares among the wheat, you will be answerable.

As you are bound to do everything in your power to keep out false teachers and false doctrines, so you must guard the door of the church against the intrusion of unworthy members. None but those who assent to all the articles of your Confession of Faith and Covenant, and give credible evidence of personal piety should receive any encouragement from you to apply for admission. Though you cannot search the heart of any man, and of course are liable to be deceived by fair appearances, you can examine every candidate upon the doctrines and upon experimental religion, and if you do this in the fear of God, with a supreme regard to his glory, and an earnest desire to see your church built up with living and active members, you may reasonably hope that he will keep out the hypocritical and unworthy. I once thought it my duty to resist the importunity of a man, who was ready enough to sign our articles of faith, but who would not promise to give up the income of his fiddle at country balls. He had influential relatives and friends, both in the church and congregation, who warmly seconded his application, and it was feared that a refusal would drive off many from the parish; but I felt bound as the pastor of the church,

to exert whatever influence I had, to keep him out, and he was not received. Two or three individuals left in consequence of this refusal ; and some of my warmest friends thought me rather too strenuous ; but the applicant soon after came out an avowed universalist, and everybody was satisfied.

A pastor ought to acquaint himself, as soon as he can, by free personal conversation, with the spiritual state of his flock, and to keep up that intimate acquaintance, as long as he holds the pastoral office. If I do not mistake, there is a very great and general deficiency here. If the Romanists carry this point to one extreme in their unholy confessionals, I am sure that many worthy Protestant ministers fall into the opposite extreme. With a few of their church members of distinguished piety they converse freely upon experimental religion. But of the personal experience of the majority—of their doubts, and fears, and conflicts, and defeats, and victories, they know very little, and how can they expect to, when they rarely if ever enquire ? Some few, when they are in trouble, will go to their pastor and lay open their feelings, but for the most part, natural timidity, or some other cause will deter them. We know from their own declarations afterwards, that many would rejoice to be spoken to by their ministers, and to open their hearts to them as their spiritual guides and teachers, who have not the courage to introduce the subject themselves ; and this is not unfrequently the case with impenitent sinners, as well as members of the church. I have felt humbled and condemned more than once, to find that the individuals whom

I met often, and whom I might have addressed personally on the subject of salvation, had long been wishing I would. And let me say here, though it be a slight digression, that where a minister preaches the truth pointedly and earnestly, there are probably, every month in the year, some who are more or less alarmed in view of their guilt and danger, and who would be glad to have him speak to them, though they may not disclose their feelings to their most intimate friends.

I hope, my dear son, that you will begin right. I take it for granted, that wherever you go, the members of your church expect you to question them affectionately upon the subject of personal religion. Introduce it discreetly, tenderly, and you will rarely find any difficulty. They will feel that you are acting in character as a minister of Christ; that you are discharging an important pastoral duty—and they will love you for it the more. Let it once be known that this is your habit, that you are accustomed on all fitting occasions to enquire just as freely, kindly and cheerfully, after the spiritual health of your flock, as you do after their bodily health, and much of that reserve which is so common will soon vanish, and what a door will this open for usefulness, in a church of two or three hundred members. Among them you will find individuals in almost every supposable state of mind, from the most doubtful evidences of piety, up almost if not quite to the full assurance of hope. Some will need instruction, warning, or encouragement on one point, and some on another. One you will find in a backsliding state, so far gone,

it may be, as to be scarcely aware of his deplorable situation, and you must, if possible, bring him back. Another is buffeted with sore temptations, and can find no rest. Another is in great spiritual darkness, and as he feels after God cries out, "Are thy mercies clean gone forever." Another has given up his hope, and is just ready to turn back to the "beggary elements of the world." Another, while he clings to his hope, gives no evidence of piety, and is in the greatest danger of perishing in his self delusion. One is in affliction, and needs to be comforted. Another is in prosperity and needs to be warned. Here is a young christian, whom you should take by the hand and lead along in the paths of righteousness, and there is an aged believer, waiting for his great change. In short, you will find no two cases exactly alike : but the experience of every member will be more or less interesting, and every case will require appropriate counsel and instruction.

I would not conceal from you, that you will find this an arduous branch of pastoral labor ; but its endless variety, as well as its vast importance, will make it exceedingly interesting. And it will be more profitable to yourself than to any member of the church. You will gain a vast amount of experience, which you could never obtain in any other way, and all this ever accumulating experience you will be able to turn to the best account in your ministry. How can a pastor who has but a little of this sort of intercourse with his church members, and who of course keeps himself ignorant of their spiritual health and infirmities, how can such a pastor know what they

most need in his weekly ministrations? How can he pray for them except in a general, indefinite way? How can he comfort the feeble-minded and support the weak? How can he ever say with Paul, "I was gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children. So being affectionately desirous of you, I was willing to have imparted unto you not only the gospel of God, but also my own soul, because ye were dear unto me."

It is too obvious to need anything more than a passing remark, that in watching over the interests of the church, it will be your duty to mark the first departures from the faith, or from christian practice, should any such cases unhappily occur. A faithful pastor does not wait, till a member has exposed himself to church censure, before he moves. This would be like disregarding the first symptoms of a dangerous disease, and trying no remedies till it has reached its crisis. The moment you become convinced that one of your flock is going astray, you ought to attend to his case. No time is to be lost. If you put it off for a few days only, he may be beyond your reach. Perhaps he has some particular friend in the church, whom you can send to him, to warn him of his danger. Sometimes this may be preferable to going yourself. When one is beginning to slide, if a brother can stretch out his hand and save him, it does them both good. But whenever your personal agency and influence are required, let nothing hinder you from interposing. It is infinitely better to prevent scandal in the church, than to allow it to break out, and then discipline the offender; and I

cannot help thinking, that many most painful cases of discipline might be prevented, by more watchfulness on the part of those who are set over the churches in the Lord.

“It is impossible, however, but that offences come.” No degree of pastoral vigilance can wholly supersede the necessity of church censure. Some will deny the faith, and others will fall into gross immorality, in spite of all human watchfulness. When such cases occur, they must receive prompt attention. The leprosy will spread, if it is not cured. The old leaven will work, if it is not “purged out.” The offender must be dealt with, reclaimed, and led to confess his fault, or if he prove incorrigible, he must be cut off by a solemn judicial act. As it will be your duty to preside in all church trials, you cannot consistently be the prosecutor in any. This duty will devolve upon the aggrieved brother, upon the elders, or upon a standing, or a special committee. I shall have a good deal to say to the churches on this head, in another series of letters, should I live to write them. At present I am trying to point out *your* duties, and not those of your church. Although it does not belong to you to prosecute offenders, you will be expected to see that it is done, where the whole church is scandalized, and the cause of Christ is suffering, through their heresies or immorality. If those of the church, to whom it belongs, move promptly, and come to you for advice, it is well. They do no more than it is their duty to do. But if they do not act, how can you be silent and suffer sin to go unreproved? I have no hesitation in saying, that you

are bound to exhort the session or the church, as the case may be, to take the steps of the gospel with the offending brother, and “if need so require,” earnestly to point out both the guilt and the danger of delay. You ought to give them no rest in their neglect of so plain a duty. Let them see that you are “troubled in spirit,” whenever they meet you, that you are grieved for the afflictions of Jacob, and that you go mourning all the day over the dishonor that is suffered to rest upon the cause of the blessed Redeemer. Try this course effectually. It can hardly fail of success. If it should, however, after patient waiting and many prayers ; if it should become manifest, that there is not piety and strength enough in the church to maintain gospel discipline, then it may become a question, whether you ought to remain and witness the ruin which must ensue, or “shake off the dust of your feet,” and go to another place. I have no fears, at present, my dear son, that you will ever be driven to this alternative in L—— ; but a case of this sort may be supposed, in which it would be the duty of a pastor to relinquish his charge.

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XXVIII.

MY DEAR E.

ALTHOUGH you are the installed and settled pastor of the second Presbyterian church and congregation in L——, and they have the first claim upon your services, both in the pulpit and out of the pulpit, it is not an *exclusive* claim. They would have no right to shut you up within these narrow limits, if they were ever so much disposed, as I am sure they are not. You are the servant of Christ. You hold your commission from him, and it is a general commission. He has, to be sure, given you the particular charge of one branch of his church, and he holds you responsible for the faithful discharge of every ministerial and pastoral duty in your present connection. But he has no where said or intended, that all your energies and all your influence are to be confined to that one spot. Your preaching may be occasionally called for elsewhere. Your advice may be wanted a hundred miles from home. There is a general as well as a particular oversight of the churches, which devolves upon the pastors, or upon the pastors and delegates. It does not fall within the scope of these letters to discuss the comparative advantages of the several forms of ecclesiastical polity, which distinguish the leading denominations in this country. As you are in the Presbyterian connection, it will be your duty to attend the regular

meetings of the Presbytery to which you belong, and of the Synod and General Assembly in your turn. It may often be more agreeable and a great deal more convenient to stay at home ; but such reasons cannot excuse you. By taking a pastoral charge of a presbyterian church, you have virtually bound yourself to bear your part of the burden and responsibility of a general supervision, the necessity of which is too obvious to need remark. If the harmony, discipline, doctrinal purity and efficient action of the churches could be secured in some easier way, you would be as much entitled as any of your brethren to the relief. But as long as the present organization, continues, and you are a presbyterian minister, you cannot reasonably ask for a dispensation. If you have any wisdom or experience to impart, the churches are entitled to it. If you can have any influence in counsel or by your vote, to carry a good measure, or to defeat a bad one, you are not at liberty to withhold that influence. It may cost you no little fatigue. It may require more time than you know how to spare ; but in this case as well as every other, the greater good ought to prevail. The lesser sacrifice should be cheerfully made.

Besides, young ministers, like yourself, have a greater personal interest than some are aware of, in attending ecclesiastical judicatories, ordinations and other meetings for business or mutual improvement. One of the distinguished fathers of the presbyterian church, now living, has said, that he never knew a minister rise to eminent influence and great usefulness, who was in the habit of neglecting the meetings

of his brethren. Remember, my son, that you have a great deal yet to learn from the experience and mature counsels of the fathers ; and how can you learn so fast, or with so little trouble, as when they meet for the transaction of important business ? You may think you have not time to spare from writing sermons, and from pastoral duties ; but you will gain more in the long run, than you will lose, in these very particulars. When a man has been confined for a long time to his study, and his parish, his mind is apt to grow narrow, and lose some of its elasticity. It wants a little rest, or rather it wants a change. It wants to look abroad and take a wider view of things. It wants friction by being brought into contact with living minds, to prevent the rust from accumulating, and to excite the latent sparks of genius, if there are any. What young minister ever attends a presbytery, association, or other ecclesiastical meeting of his fathers and brethren, without feeling himself richly paid for his time and trouble ? If you form the habit of punctual attendance now, in the beginning of your ministry, you will find it easy ever after. Otherwise you will grow more and more remiss, as you grow older.

One word more on this point. Always be *in season*. The time of your brethren is as precious as yours, and to make them wait for your tardiness is, in all ordinary cases inexcusable. It is easier to be too early than too late. Always make your calculation to be a little before the time, and you will seldom fall behind. I am not sure, but that some ministers think it adds to their dignity and consequence, to

come in, after their brethren have all assembled, and are anxiously looking for them. However this may be, I hope, my son, you will never be so great a man as that. It will require too much space to move in.

Located as you are, you may be frequently called abroad to assist in forming new churches. I hope you will ; and that you will by no means decline, when it is in your power to go. No mere personal inconvenience, short of bad health and the consequent risk of going abroad, should hinder you.

You may also have urgent calls to preach where there are revivals ; and where the churches are with, or without pastors. Such calls will be most urgent, where the people are panting for the bread of life, and have none to break it to them. But your brethren will sometimes need help in "the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord," and your assistance for a few days may be of inestimable value.

Moreover, in this remarkable age of christian enterprise, you should hold yourself in readiness to attend religious anniversaries, both large and small, when your services are wanted, and there is a prospect of doing good by stirring up the churches to greater efforts. It may be necessary also, that you should devote a good deal of time to the direct management of Missionary, Bible, and other benevolent Societies. Somebody must do it, or they cannot be kept up. Many must enlist in the great and glorious cause of a dying world, and why should you decline your share of the labors ? I have confidence in you, my son, that you will not.

I shall only add, that the cause of education will

have strong claims upon you, as an educated man and a minister. I am not disposed to depreciate the services of other educated and professional men, in building up and sustaining the schools and colleges of this country ; for many of them have always been found in the first rank. Without the co-operation of legislators and intelligent private laymen, none of our educational institutions would flourish. But I hazard nothing in saying, that in New England, however it may be in other parts of the land, these institutions are more indebted to the efforts and superintendence of the clergy, than to those of any other single class. Nor, in saying this, do I intend to represent them as entitled to any particular credit. They have done no more than it was their duty to do. They are under better advantages, than any other class in the country, to exert a direct personal influence. Arduous as are their ministerial and pastoral labors, they have their time more at command than lawyers or physicians, or those who make and administer the laws of the country. They can visit the schools of the town, and attend the examinations of academies in the vicinity, when the necessary engagements of other professional men render it impossible for them to be equally punctual. And so in regard to the public seminaries. Judges cannot leave the bench, nor counsellors the bar, nor physicians their patients, nor legislators their halls, to examine the classes in a college, nor to attend the anniversaries. Sometimes they can be present, and many of them are as ready to make as great personal sacrifices as could be desired, to promote the cause of education in all its de-

partments. What I mean is, that their professional engagements and other public duties will often interfere; and this renders it the more necessary that ministers should supply their lack of service.

Though the time will never come, when, under the most perfect organization, ministers of the Gospel can be excused from fostering schools and colleges, the amount of labor and responsibility will depend much upon their location. Pastors and missionaries in the new states and territories will find more to do in laying the foundations, and cherishing the growth of primary schools and higher seminaries, than their brethren elsewhere. I hope, my dear son, you will carefully survey your own position, and enquire what you can do to promote the cause of popular education in L——, and more widely as you may have opportunity. Make yourself thoroughly acquainted with the condition of the schools throughout the state. Collect statistics from every quarter, as soon and as fast as you can. Find out who the men of influence are, and enquire whether their special favor and efforts cannot in some way be secured. Converse on the subject wherever you can gain a hearing. Write letters to influential friends and acquaintances, if you have any such, whom you can hope to enlist in the cause. Secure the co-operation of your brethren. Visit the schools, not only at home, but in your occasional excursions for relaxation and health, and encourage the teachers. Write paragraphs in the newspapers, to awaken public attention. If need be, unite with others in memorializing the city government and the legislature. Who can tell how much you may do,

in these and other ways, to extend the blessings of free school education throughout the State. And though you should fail, you will enjoy the satisfaction of having "done what you could."

The Academies and Colleges of the State will also be entitled to a share of your attention, in common with that of your brethren in the ministry. If you are wanted as a trustee, and can in any way "redeem the time," accept the office and discharge the duties of it faithfully. If you are not wanted, but are invited to attend the regular examinations, go, if it is in your power. Let the guardians and instructors of the Colleges see you at their commencements. Nothing encourages them more, than to find themselves surrounded on these occasions by ministers of the gospel: and if ministers do not enter heart and hand into the cause of public as well as primary education, who will?

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XXIX.

MY DEAR E.

YOU have probably been waiting with some anxiety to hear what I have to say upon *revivals of religion*. This, I confess, is a subject on which you have a right to expect the maturest thoughts, that I have been able to gather from reading, observation, experience and reflection. But I must not conceal from you, that I approach it with the deepest solicitude. There is not, within the whole range of ministerial and pastoral duty, a more important topic, nor one where wrong advice would be more hurtful to the cause of pure and undefiled religion. I dare not advance a step, without fervent prayer to God for that "wisdom which is from above." O thou Eternal Spirit, wilt thou help my infirmities, wilt thou pour light into my mind and grace into my heart. Direct me what to say to my dear son, I humbly beseech thee, and suffer me not, through mistake or prejudice, to mislead him, where issues of such infinite moment are at stake.

This anxiety does not arise from the slightest doubt, that there are "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord," in which the churches are greatly quickened, and sinners are simultaneously awakened, convicted and converted. I have no more doubt that God does thus pour out his Spirit, than I have that he gives showers in summer, or snow in

winter. But the more I see and hear of revivals, and the more I reflect on the subject, the more difficult does it appear to me, to lay down general rules for the guidance of young ministers in conducting them ; and the more wisdom does it seem to require to so co-operate with the Holy Spirit, as in reaping the harvest, to “gather the most fruit unto life eternal!” You may be too fast, or too slow, and you may do too much, or too little, you may call in too much help from abroad, or not enough ; you may have too many meetings, or too few ; may lay too much of the work upon your church, or not enough ; and may be too hasty, or too slow in the admission of converts. After all that can be said, you will be in constant danger of erring on one side or the other. Your only safety lies in “asking wisdom of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.” Still the results of experience are worth something, and it would be wrong for a father, in a series of letters like this, to withhold these results from a beloved son.

In conducting a revival of religion, the pastor has his proper sphere of action and responsibility, and the church has *its* sphere. Certain duties devolve upon him, which he cannot lay upon the church, and certain other duties rest upon the church, which it cannot shift off upon the pastor. In what I now have to say, I shall confine myself to the former class of duties, reserving such thoughts as I might offer upon the duties of churches, for their proper place in another series of letters, should I live to write them. What you want is advice, of which you can avail

yourself in the discharge of your own duties as a laborer in the vineyard of Christ. I cannot engage to answer all your questions, even to my own satisfaction; but I will do the best I can, within the limits to which I must confine myself. To do any thing like justice to this one branch of the subject would require more than a volume. They are hints and conclusions, rather than full and well reasoned answers, which I send you.

Your first question is, *On what ground are those seasons of great and general religious interest, called revivals, desirable?* And here you tell me, that some good men rather dread, than welcome them. Their objections are, that they do not like these periodical excitements; that the churches ought always to be awake and active, and that if they were, the Spirit would never cease to strive with sinners; that there are spurious, as well as genuine revivals, in which vastly more hurt than good is done; and that they greatly prefer the nightly dews of Hermon, ever fresh and ever sparkling, to occasional showers however copious, which leave the streams to dry up, and every green thing to languish in the intervals.

These objections, I acknowledge, are plausible, but they are not new, or hard to obviate. Excitement, if it exist at all, must, from the nature of man, be temporary. It may return after longer or shorter intervals, but it cannot last always; and why should it be objected to in religion, any more than where vastly inferior interests are at stake? Nobody complains of excitement, when a ship has drifted on to the breakers, and a hundred persons are seen clinging

to the wreck, nor when half a city is on fire in the night, nor where the politics of a state or a town are to be changed. And can any good reason be given, why, when the great majority of a congregation are slumbering on the brink of eternal ruin, they should not if possible be alarmed, and excited "to flee from the wrath to come?" I know there may be very different kinds of religious excitement connected with revivals. There is the excitement of sympathy, the excitement of mere animal feeling, the excitement of a heated imagination. These, where they show themselves, and threaten to gain the ascendancy, are rather to be repressed than encouraged. But there is also the excitement of well grounded fear, of agonized conviction, when the fountains of the great deep of depravity in the soul are, as it were, broken up, and the sinner sees himself justly exposed to the wrath and curse of God forever. And will any one say, that he has no reason to be excited, to be alarmed? But if one person has, why have not a hundred, or five hundred, who lie under the same condemnation? If, in the midst of a revival, the excitement should assume anything like a heated and fanatical aspect, this would be a good reason for alarm, and for the prompt application of counteracting influences; but none for dreading religious excitement of the right kind, and when kept within due bounds. Were not the three thousand highly excited on the day of Pentecost, when they were pricked in the heart, and cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" What pious minister would not rejoice to witness just such a scene in his own congregation? And

were he to witness something like it several times in the course of his ministry, would he have any reason to dread these periodical excitements?

That the churches ought always to cherish the reviving influence of the Holy Spirit; always to be awake, active and prayerful; and that it is delightful to enjoy what may be called a constant revival, as is the case, when some of the congregation are always in an enquiring state, and one after another pressing into the kingdom, I readily grant. For several years after my settlement in P——, I found individuals almost every month under deep religious concern, and the church was gradually increased by these steady droppings, till I began to feel, that such gradual accessions were more desirable than the gathering in of great numbers at once in a powerful revival. But afterwards, when God was pleased again and again to pour out his spirit upon the congregation, and on one communion Sabbath we received nearly a hundred new members, and among them many of the most influential men of the town, I came to the conclusion, that in whatever way God is pleased to convert sinners, whether gradually or simultaneously, whether in revivals or not in revivals, it is the *best* way, and we ought to rejoice in it. God is a sovereign. As he renews the hearts of men when and where he pleases, so he sends down his Spirit, as the “small rain or the great rain of his strength,” according to his pleasure. Whatever may have been the economy of his grace in some ages or countries, revivals have been common in the most flourishing state of the church, from the day of

Pentecost down to our own times ; and it admits not of a doubt, that a vast majority of the most devoted members of the American churches have, within the last forty years, been brought in by revivals. The great body of the most laborious and successful ministers now on the stage in this country were converted in revivals, and so were nearly all our foreign missionaries. And I think we have every reason to believe from the prophecies and from the operations of the Spirit, both at home and abroad, that, as the millenium approaches, revivals will become more and more frequent and powerful, till the earth is "filled with the knowledge and glory of the Lord." Are they not, then, exceedingly to be desired in every place, especially as, judging from the experience of our churches for nearly half a century, there is but little probability that sinners will be converted at all, if these showers are withheld ?

Your next question is, *What are the best means of promoting revivals ?* Or to put the question in a more definite shape, "As there is at present no especial religious interest in my church and congregation, what can I do to arouse christians from their slumbers, and to awaken and convert impenitent sinners ?" You could not, my son, as a young pastor, ask a more important question. And you will anticipate what my first answer must be. In your own strength you can do *nothing*. You have no more power to produce a revival, or to convert one sinner, than you have to raise the dead. In fact, it would be raising the "dead in trespasses and sins," and this requires the working of that "mighty power, which

brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ." But though "the excellency of the power is wholly of God," he works by means and instruments; and the better adapted these are to the end, the more successful the christian ministry.

In laboring for a revival, it is not necessary that you should "sound a trumpet before you." There is no charm in the word revival, to quicken saints, or to awaken sinners. Revivals are not regarded by the world as they were twenty years ago. Then they were attended with such demonstrations of the power of God, they were conducted in so orderly a manner, and their influence was so happy and abiding, that the most sharp sighted opposer of evangelical religion could find very little to say against them. But since that time, they have, in some parts of the country, been brought into great discredit by the indiscretion, (to use the mildest term,) of evangelists and others, whom their admirers are wont to call *revival* preachers. In the minds of some intelligent, but not religious men, almost everywhere, the word *revival* is synonymous with mere animal excitement, with "anxious seats," with rant, and with the wildest fanaticism. The consequence is, that the term has become exceedingly odious to individuals of this class, and cannot be mentioned without bringing up a great many associations, which are hostile to all religious impression. They think at once of all the disorders they have witnessed, or heard of; of what is reproachfully called the *getting up of revivals*; of the machinery by which they are sometimes carried on; of the rending of churches and the dis-

mission of ministers ; and without making any distinction between those revivals which are genuine and those which are spurious, these persons are so prejudiced against them all, that the bare mention of the name puts them at once in a hostile attitude.

Now, "he that winneth souls is wise." And where prejudices are known to exist against words or phrases which are not found in the Bible, he will avoid them and substitute others, which convey the meaning just as well. This is what I would advise you to do in the case before us. What you want, are the blessed *influences* and *fruits* of a revival, and not the *name*. If, by the blessing of God on your labors, your church should be excited to fervent believing prayer and holy living, and great numbers of sinners should be awakened and converted by the Holy Spirit, there would be a revival ; you would have the substance, which is all you need to care for. If therefore, you know, or have reason to think, that any of your hearers are prejudiced against revivals, in consequence of the disorders which, under ignorant and fanatical management, sometimes attend them, why should you use the term in your preaching, when you can just as well employ all the appropriate means without it ? These means are,

First, *searching, direct, and discriminating preaching*. "The sword of the spirit is the word of God." The church is to be aroused ; and to this end, you must bring the truth to bear directly upon it, with all the earnestness and power you can command. You must preach to christians a great deal. You must point out to them the guilt and danger of back-

sliding, in the most vivid colors. You must ply them with every motive and argument, that can be drawn from the scriptures, to "repent and do their first works." You must exhort them to examine the foundation of their hopes, and point out the many dangers of self-deception, to which they are exposed. You must urge them to aim at a high standard of personal piety ; to dedicate themselves anew to God ; to consecrate all their power and influence to his service, and to pray without ceasing for the conversion of sinners and the building up of the church. So long as the church slumbers, there is but little hope that the impenitent will be awakened.

But any discouragement you may meet with in trying to wake up the church, must not hinder you from making the most solemn, direct and affectionate appeals to the congregation. "All things are possible with God." He may bless your efforts to alarm the stupid sinner, if you cannot arouse the sleeping professor. But mere exhortation will not do. The impenitent need *instruction*. They need to have the grounds of God's righteous condemnation clearly pointed out to them. Their consciences must be probed to the bottom. The naked sword of the Spirit must be wielded with a strong and steady hand. Without a course of discriminating and instructive *preaching*, both to the church and the congregation, there can be very little hope of a *revival*: nor with it even, unless it is sanctified by earnest prayer for the descent of the Holy Ghost.

Nor must you rest here. You must labor *out* of the pulpit as well as *in* the pulpit. You must visit

the members of the church, and converse with them privately, and try to stir them up to self-examination, to secret and social prayer, and to such efforts as they can make for the conversion of their impenitent friends and neighbors. You will not have done all your duty, till you have enlisted as much prayer and effort as you possibly can in the church.

Another means, which you can use for promoting a revival is, to visit the impenitent with this express object in view, and wherever you can gain a hearing, to converse tenderly with them upon their spiritual and eternal interests. Such labors of love are often eminently blessed, and revivals are sometimes begun, which issue in the flocking of a multitude of souls to Christ.

Holding meetings for prayer and preaching, on week days, in different sections of the parish, is another means which God often blesses to the same end. Indeed a minister, who contents himself with his two sermons on the Sabbath, can hardly expect to see the work of the Lord revived among his people. The impression wears off, if it is not renewed in the prayer meeting and the lecture room. But as far as my observation has gone, multiplying religious meetings, where there is no special interest, seldom does any good. They are commonly but poorly attended, the pastor is disheartened, the church is discouraged, and "all things continue as they were." It does no good to hold extra meetings, unless the people will come together. We must begin further back. There must be more prayer, more labor with the church, more in the Bible class

and Sabbath school, and more visiting from house to house. As soon as there is a demand for extra preaching, let the people have it. "When thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, thou shalt bestir thyself; for then shall the Lord go out before thee."

This seems to be as good a place as any other, to say something about *four days' meetings* and other special means, which have been extensively used in the American churches, with various success. I do not object to what are call *protracted meetings*, provided they are judiciously timed, and not too much *protracted*. I believe, that in many places they have been greatly blessed. When they were first introduced, and for a considerable time after they had become quite common, the churches felt the importance of preparing for them by prayer and fasting. On account of the novelty, many persons were induced to attend them, who could not probably have been brought under the means of grace in any other way. Their attention was arrested. They were induced to go again and again, and the truth being thus steadily kept before their minds from day to day, was set home by the Spirit of God with saving power upon their hearts.

But I am equally well convinced, that the system has been carried too far, and relied upon too much. In fact, it may be said to have been entirely worn out, where it was once in the highest repute. I could mention sections of the country, where these meetings have signally failed, and where the reaction has been tremendous. Many once flourishing churches,

I fear, will not recover from it for many years to come. So great, for a considerable time, was the popularity and apparent success of protracted meetings, during which all business was nearly suspended by the multitudes who flocked to them, that both ministers and people came at length to feel, as if there was an inseparable connection between these meetings and powerful revivals. Indeed, many seemed to talk and act as if they could not expect revivals without them. Under this impression, if four days, (the period to which they were at first limited,) did not answer the purpose, they would add four, or six, or ten days more ; and so they actually went on, increasing the length up to twenty, thirty and even *forty* days, without giving either preachers or hearers any time for rest. The consequence was, that hundreds of the most spiritual members of the churches sunk down exhausted under the pressure. All the excitability in the congregations, which could be brought under the influence of the meetings, was used up, and the collapse was in some cases truly deplorable. This, I know, was not the fault of the *system*, but of the *abuse* of it ; and I am not ignorant, that this high pressure has recently been kept up for a long time in some of the Baptist churches of Boston, by a celebrated evangelist of that very respectable denomination. Of the fruits and results of this long protracted excitement, it will be safer to speak with confidence a year or two hence, than it is now. In the Congregational churches of New England, so far as my knowledge extends, there is now very little anxiety manifested for *four days'* meeting, upon the

old plan. *Evening* meetings have of late been extensively substituted in a quiet way, and often with the best results. The people are invited to assemble for a number of successive evenings, to hear the gospel preached by their own pastors, aided perhaps more or less by brethren in the immediate vicinity. Under this arrangement, where there is interest enough to secure a full attendance, and where "all things are done decently and in order," we may reasonably expect that good will be done. But this, in turn, will probably be pushed to extremes, and then the most judicious friends of revivals will resort to some other means, to wake up slumbering churches, and arrest the attention of stupid sinners.

Indeed it is my prevailing opinion, that *any* system of extra efforts, which can be devised, will be unwarrantably relied upon, or wear out in time, and must be laid aside. Whenever this is the case, it cannot be doubted that those who ask wisdom of God, in a right manner, will be directed to such other means, as he will bless for the building up of his church. But they must be scriptural means; means that have no tendency to throw the Sabbath or any of the divinely instituted ministrations of the sanctuary into the back-ground. Any system, which aims at doing up the whole work of the Lord in a few days, or which leads a people to undervalue the stated administration of his truth, on the day which he has set apart expressly for religious instruction, is dangerous. Whatever else may be right or wrong in our arrangements and efforts, we are sure, that it is right to make as much as possible of the Sabbath

and the regular preaching of the gospel, as well before a revival commences, as when it is in full progress.

Your next question, is, *How shall I know when a revival is begun in my church and congregation?* I should once have thought it much easier to answer this question, than I do now. I have so many times had my hopes raised by favorable appearances, and been disappointed ; have so often thought there was “ the sound of abundance of rain,” and it did not come, that I am much slower to decide whether a revival has actually commenced, or not, than I used to be. No certain evidence of it can be drawn from observing that your meetings are crowded, still and solemn ; that some individuals are affected even to tears under your preaching ; that enquirers begin to resort to your study, and that the church is very much encouraged. All these are favorable indications, and may well excite your hopes, while they stimulate you to increased effort and prayer. But they may pass away “ as the morning cloud and the early dew.” I have myself experienced several such alternations of hope and discouragement, before the revival actually came. There are, however, signs and evidences, on which you may rely. If there are great searchings of heart in the church ; if old hopes are shaken ; if differences of long standing are healed by mutual confessions ; if christians are remarkably humble and prayerful, if they speak often one to another, and if their bowels yearn over the impenitent, there is a revival begun. There can be no doubt of it. And when in connection with such a state of things in

the church, sinners in considerable numbers are awakened, when you find here and there cases of genuine conviction, and some individuals giving striking evidence that they have been born again, you need not doubt that a real work of grace has commenced in the congregation as well as in the church. But even then you should guard against expressing yourself too sanguinely, when you speak on the subject, and should exhort the church to "rejoice with trembling." It is not certain, that because God has begun to revive his work, he will carry it on, that because a few have been converted, many more will be. The Holy Spirit may be grieved, and may depart, ere you have sung out your first song. While the grace of God, which is displayed in a single conversion, is infinite, and worthy to be magnified in everlasting thanksgivings, I am convinced, that incipient revivals are sometimes checked by the confident and sanguine manner in which ministers speak of them. They run before the spirit of the Lord. Fewer are under deep religious impressions, than they imagine, though many may be enquiring. They "look for much, and it comes to little."

I hope, my dear son, there will soon be "a noise and shaking among the dry bones" around you. I hope you will have unequivocal evidence, that a revival has commenced both in your church and congregation. But should this be the case, write guardedly, if you write at all to your friends abroad on the subject; and caution your church to do the same. It tends to bring the work of the Lord into doubt and discredit, to have it noised abroad, that a powerful

revival has commenced in any place, and to have it prove transient and almost fruitless. The cause of religion, I believe, has sometimes suffered greatly in this way. Ask for the prayers of christians as earnestly and as widely as you can. Enter into the work with all your heart, and wait to see what the Lord will do. Should he work mightily in the conviction and conversion of sinners, when the proper time arrives, when the converts are after a suitable probation gathered into the church, then declare what God hath done for your people, that he may have the glory, and that his children, far and near, may unite with you in "praising him for his mighty acts."

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XXX.

MY DEAR E.

“As cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.” When I wrote you last, I hardly dared to hope, that you would so soon “see the salvation of God.” You think there are now undoubtedly tokens of the Divine presence in your congregation, and that a revival has actually begun. I do not wonder, that this new state of things excites great solicitude in your mind. I should be alarmed for you, if it did not. The crisis is extremely momentous. In all probability, the eternal destiny of a great many of your hearers will be decided in a few weeks. If they are not converted, they may be finally given over to a hard heart and a blind mind. I know how to feel for you. I have a vivid recollection of the first revival under my own ministry, almost thirty years ago. It is surprising how many questions a young and inexperienced pastor wants to ask at such a time ; and it is certainly the duty of a father to answer as many of them as he can, when they are asked by a beloved son in the ministry.

Your people now begin to call in earnest for more religious instruction. Deaf ears are unstopped. Your congregation on the Sabbath is increased, and there is a general solemnity throughout the house. Your week-day meetings are thronged. Those who never used to attend them at all, now wish to meet

every night, and you will undoubtedly be requested by some of the best members of your church to gratify them. You will be told, that when the Lord works, he expects his servants to rise up and build with all their might, and it is true. Extra labors and more frequent meetings are undoubtedly called for ; but when you ask me *how many*, I cannot tell. No general rule can be given. It must depend upon a great many circumstances, which are never exactly similar in any two congregations, and which are almost daily changing during a revival, even in the same congregation. I have no doubt, that where a people have not regularly enjoyed the instruction of a faithful and orthodox ministry, they need more preaching, when the Spirit is poured out, than those who have been better taught. And I am quite sure, that wherever a revival continues six months, or even three months, more meetings are required some weeks than others. As a general rule, I believe there ought to be more preaching in the early part of a revival than towards the close, or even than when it has been long enough in progress fully to develop its character.

But although it is impossible to give definite advice, without being on the spot and knowing all the circumstances, there are certain general principles which you should study, and which will help you to a right decision. There is what may be called *demand* and *supply*, in the religious state of a community, as well as in its economical state. This demand is far greater when christians are revived and the spirit of God is striving with sinners, than when

there is no special excitement ; and it ought to be promptly and fully met. There can be no excuse for not feeding the hungry as often and as much as they need, when “there is bread enough in our Father’s house and to spare.” You must meet your people much oftener, and furnish them with more preaching in the midst of a revival, than would be either necessary or profitable under different circumstances. Were you merely to preach, and to preach ever so well on the Sabbath, or to add only one more good sermon about the middle of the week, you would not meet the demand. Those who are enquiring what they must do to be saved, and those who are beginning to feel a little interest would be liable to lose it in the intervals. If awakened sinners are not addressed often, they are very apt to become stupid again ; and if the stupid are not addressed more than once a week, after the Sabbath, there is great danger that they will never be thoroughly awakened at all. But there is danger of going to the opposite extreme. Meetings may be multiplied too much ; and I believe this is the more common error. They may crowd so closely upon each other as to leave very little time for retirement, reading the scriptures, and secret prayer ; or may in a few weeks, so deaden the sensibilities of saints and sinners by mere exhaustion, as to disqualify them for deriving any advantage from preaching, even on the Sabbath. There cannot be a greater mistake than to suppose, that the power and continuance of a revival must be in proportion to the number of week-day meetings. I have known revivals seriously checked,

and they have often been stopped by multiplying meetings too much. Some ministers and many excellent members of the church infer, that, because two or three extra sermons in a week are obviously blessed in the awakening and conversion of sinners, adding more public labor must give an increased impulse to the work. But I venture to say, there is nothing either in scripture, in the constitution of the human mind, or in general experience to justify such a conclusion. There are limits beyond which all extra public labors are worse than lost. No man in the world, whether converted or unconverted, can hear preaching two or three times a day, week in and week out, to any advantage. What good does it do to keep pouring into a vessel which is already full? What judicious physician or nurse would give a sick man food faster than he can digest it, because he has a craving appetite? Even the most healthy person in the world, cannot be always indulging himself at a well spread table. So far as a revival is to be carried on by preaching, the great thing is to keep up a healthy attention, and to give the people instruction, as fast as they can receive it, but no faster.

As I said before, it is impossible to lay down any general rule with regard to the frequency of public meetings. Every pastor must judge for himself, in view of the existing state of things in his congregation. I have never seen a revival, (and I have witnessed several in which the Spirit of the Lord wrought mightily), but I have never seen one, which in my judgment required more than two sermons a week,

in the church or lecture room, besides three regular services on the Sabbath. During the very remarkable revival of 1821, in P——, of which you must have some remembrance, we had a general enquiry meeting on Monday evening, preaching on Tuesday evening, a meeting for prayer on Thursday evening, and preaching again on Friday evening. Besides these there were lectures in remote parts of the town, to interest as many as we could and bring them to the centre, and for the benefit of those who could not regularly come. There were also many little prayer meetings in the several neighborhoods. In looking back to that memorable season, I think we had quite as many meetings as the mighty progress of the revival called for, and subsequent experience has confirmed the opinion which I then formed, that the state of things must be very peculiar, to require more, I mean, after the work has fairly commenced. If christians had nothing else to do but attend meetings, and if sinners had nothing else to do but to hear preaching, if they had no Bibles to read, and no private instruction to receive, and no wicked and deceitful hearts to examine, and no secret places in which to pray, the case would be different. But if “the kingdom of God cometh not with observation;” if there is any danger of too much running abroad and outward bustle, to the neglect of private duties, then we should be on our guard, not to let the public means of grace in a revival encroach too much upon the religion of the family and the closet. That christian must have been very superficial in self-examination, who does not know how much easier it is

to attend public meetings, than to keep his heart right with God in the closet, and must be very forgetful, not to remember how much easier it was for him, when he was awakened, to hear sermons and exhortations, than to shut himself up with his Bible, with his own impenitent heart, and his God.

Your next question is, *who shall do the preaching?* And my unhesitating answer is, do as much of it as you can yourself. You are the pastor. You know the state and wants of your flock better than any other man. The people know you better, and have more confidence in you as a spiritual guide and religious teacher. They are used to your preaching. Your style and trains of thought and illustrations are all familiar to them. With ordinary health, you can preach oftener during a revival than at any other time. It is vastly easier. If you enter into the work of the Lord with all your heart, you will never be at a loss for suitable topics. They will be suggested to your mind faster than you can dispose of them. You cannot expect to get much time to write, it is true; nor will it be necessary. It will astonish you to find, with what freedom you can speak on almost any subject, and at the shortest notice. Thoughts and words will come to you as they never did before. In this there will be nothing super-natural—no miraculous gifts; but the Spirit of God will help you, and you will be able, without much exposure, to accomplish more than you could beforehand have believed possible, under any circumstances. My belief is, that some young pastors, under the erroneous impression that their strength will not hold out,

call in aid sooner than they need to, and rely more upon it, as the work advances, than is best either for them or their people.

But should the revival, which has commenced in L——, spread through the congregation, you will undoubtedly want help at least in the pulpit. There will be a demand for more sermons than you can preach, constantly engaged as you must be in visiting, and directing enquiring souls to Christ. And let me advise you, by all means to call in *pastors*, in preference to *evangelists*. This was the course pursued with the happiest effects, in the great revivals which took place in Connecticut and Massachusetts, just at the close of the last century, under the preaching of Strong, West, Hallock, Mills, Griffin, Hooker, Miller, Hyde, Williams and others “of the like precious faith.” No evangelists were then employed to help the pastors, or to take the work out of their hands, as has been so common within your own remembrance. When a minister wanted help, he invited his brethren in the immediate vicinity to preach his lectures, and render him whatever other assistance he might need. They felt that they were all engaged in one common cause. There was preaching enough. The work went on gloriously, continued for a long time, and the fruits of it were most precious.

I hope, my dear son, that, so far as you may stand in need of help, you will adopt the same course. Invite in your brethren who have pastoral charges. They will come with the greatest cheerfulness, and it will do them good. You might, perhaps, find

some celebrated evangelist, who would be glad to help you; and I have known preachers of this class, in whom you might have entire confidence. But for reasons which will readily occur to any one, who has watched the progress of things for a few years past, and which I reserve for the serious consideration of the churches, I hope you will not find it necessary to go much, if any, beyond the pastoral circle around you for help. The greatest objection, as I shall endeavor to show, lies against employing *professed* revivalists. They are the men, who, though they may seem to do much good for the time, are most likely in the end, to unsettle and weaken the churches.

But let who will be called in to aid you, keep the direction of things entirely in your own hands. Appoint all the meetings; suffer no measures to be introduced which you do not approve of, and let it be seen everywhere, that you are the pastor, and that you feel responsible to God, not only for what you do yourself, but for what others do under your eye and sanction.

Let who will come to assist you, preach yourself as often as you can. If you have three discourses on the Sabbath, by all means preach one of them, if not two. No pastor can long hold his place, and retain the affections and confidence of his people, who allows himself to be thrust into the back-ground, or voluntarily sits by in silence, Sabbath after Sabbath, during a powerful revival.

You next wish for my advice in regard to the *kind of preaching*, which is best suited to awaken and convert sinners in the progress of a revival. I feel

and acknowledge the vital importance of this enquiry. It is of but little consequence *who* the preacher is, compared with *what* he preaches. If fundamental error is preached, it will do infinite harm, even though it were to come from the lips of an Apostle, or of "an Angel from heaven." And even the truth may do but little good, if it is not adapted to the existing state of things in the congregation. How injudicious it would be, for example, to preach upon the being of a God, when sinners come together to learn what they must do to be saved, though this is a truth, which lies at the foundation of all religion. Who would think of turning off a crowd of anxious enquirers with a learned discourse upon the first verse in Genesis, or the return of the Jews to their own land, or the scriptural mode and subjects of baptism? Such a discourse might be very able and very convincing; and yet it would be entirely out of place. There is no reason to think, that a thousand such sermons would convert one sinner. It is by no means certain that, because a sermon is sound and orthodox, it must do good, let the state and circumstances of the congregation be what they may. Is it to the purpose? Does it meet the present condition and wants of the people? "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is *profitable*." It is all true from Genesis to Revelation; but it no more follows, that every truth is equally well suited to all times and seasons, and to persons of all ages, conditions and characters, than it does, that all kinds of wholesome food are suited to the sick and the well, the feeble and the strong, the babe and the full grown man.

As God has evidently begun a special work of grace in your congregation, it is your duty to dwell almost exclusively upon those subjects which are best adapted to humble and rouse the church, to alarm the careless, to convince sinners of their guilt, as well as of their fearful exposure, to strip them of all their vain excuses, to bring them at once to the foot of the cross, to guard them against false hopes, and to prepare them for a safe and well grounded profession of faith in Christ. To these points let all your energies, for the present, be directed. The proper time will come to introduce other topics, but you must wait for it. This is your harvest time, and the Lord of the harvest expects you to gather as much wheat as you possibly can, into his garner. It would not be strange, if in the midst of this revival, some zealous agent should come along, and want to present the claims of his favorite society to your people ; nor, should you object on account of the peculiar state of things, would it be strange if he were to tell you, that he has no belief in the genuineness of a revival, which would be checked by the discussion of any great philanthropic question, by which the public mind is, or ought to be agitated. And what if he does not *believe*, that his preaching on a subject quite foreign from the immediate conversion of sinners, would have any tendency to stop the revival, by diverting the minds of enquirers from the "great salvation?" He may be entirely mistaken ; and whose belief is to govern in such a case, yours or his ? Who is responsible, the pastor, or this stranger ? The truth is, that in certain stages of a revival, *any* thing,

any subject, aside from the work which is going on, may do infinite mischief, by being thrust in, and crowding out the enquiry, "what must I do to be saved?" Over and over again have I witnessed such a state of things among my own people, that I would not have yielded my place in the pulpit to any agent whatever, for a single half day. I could not have done it with a clear conscience. "The children had come to the birth." The loss of that one opportunity might be fatal to many. A few hours neglect, and they might perish.

Should the revival, with which you are now blessed, go on with power, there will be times when you will feel, that certain subjects must be brought forward *immediately*. They cannot be postponed a week, or even a day, without extreme hazard. And what now, if an agent were to come and ask you for that Sabbath? Could you spare it? Would you not say to him, "brother, I am glad to see you, and if you will lay aside your particular object, and preach with special reference to the state of my congregation, I shall be glad of your assistance; but if not, you must come again?" I am sure you would. I am sure you *ought*; and the man who should blame you for it, would show either a great want of interest, or of experience in revivals.

Let your preaching be as direct, pungent and searching as you can make it. Spend no time in rounding and polishing your periods. Bring out the truth in its naked majesty, and let the drapery go. Give backsliding and luke warm professors no peace. Tell them honestly, that you fear they have no re-

ligion—nothing but the form ; that they are stumbling blocks in the way of sinners ; that instead of helping forward the work, they weaken the church, and hang as dead weights upon the chariot wheels of salvation. Warn sinners night and day, as Paul did, with tears. If any of them “sleep on,” let it be under the quaking and thunderings of Sinai.

There is happily but little difference of opinion among sound and evangelical ministers, in regard to the topics which ought to be chiefly insisted on in revivals of religion.

“The following,” says *Dr. Wayland* in the Appendix to Sprague’s Letters, “I believe to be some of the most important. The entire want of holiness of all men by nature ; the justice of God in the everlasting condemnation of sinners ; the exceeding sinfulness of sin ; the entire inability of man, by his own works, to reconcile himself to God ; the sufficiency, freedom, and fulness of the atonement ; the duty of immediate repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ ; the inexcusableness of delay ; the exhibition of the refuges of lies under which sinners hide themselves ; the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners ; the clear exhibition of the truth, that he is under no manner of obligation to save them, and the necessity of the agency of the Spirit of God to the conversion of any individual of the human race.”

Dr. Hyde whom you well remember, as the patriarch of Berkshire County, Massachusetts, and whose labors were remarkably blessed in revivals of religion, tells us, that the substance of his preaching at such times was, “the holiness and immutability of God ;

the purity and perfection of his law ; the entire depravity of the heart, consisting of voluntary opposition to God and holiness ; the fulness and all sufficiency of the atonement made by Christ ; the freeness of the offer of pardon made to all, on condition of repentance ; the necessity of a change of heart by the Holy Spirit, arising from the deep rooted depravity of men, which no created arm could remove ; the utter inexcusableness of sinners in rejecting the kind overtures of mercy, as they act freely and voluntarily in doing it ; and the duty and reasonableness of immediate submission to God."

These, for substance, are the doctrines which have been preached and most eminently blessed in American revivals, from the days of Edwards, Whitfield, and Bellamy, to the present hour ; and which, I have no doubt, God will continue to bless, down to the end of time. They place God on the throne, and the sinner in the dust, as a rebel justly doomed to death. They bring the law to bear with all its reasonable claims, and all its terrible denunciations, directly upon the sinner's conscience. They show him that there is but one way of escape, and that so wicked is his heart, he will never avail himself of it, unless made "willing in the day of God's power." They bring him in guilty, before the whole universe, of "destroying himself," and prepare him, when plucked as "a brand from the burning," to ascribe his deliverance to the infinite grace and mercy of God. I have heard the doctrines of divine sovereignty and election preached with great success in the height of a revival. Many said, you will stop the

work. You will drive some to despair, and others away from the meetings. But no ; the Holy Ghost came down from heaven. The meetings were more thronged and solemn than ever. Sinners saw that all their hope was in the mercy of God ; that if left to themselves, they must certainly perish. It was the doctrine of election that kept them from absolute despair.

The more thorough you are in your preaching, my son, the more you exalt God ; the more you lay open the windings and desperate wickedness of the human heart ; the more clearly you prove the impossibility of the sinner's ever being justified by the deeds of the law ; the more you press him with the guilt and ingratitude of rejecting Christ, the deeper and more genuine will be his convictions, and the greater the probability that his conversion will be radical and saving. He may, it is true, be self-deceived after all ; but it is much more difficult to get a false hope, under such preaching, than where the preaching is superficial and indefinite. "They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly." Have we not reason to fear, that this has been the case, in some places, where converts have been counted by scores, if not by hundreds ?

Let your appeals, my dear E., be to the hearts and consciences of your hearers, and not to their animal sympathies. It is perfectly easy, when the attention of large numbers is once called up, to work upon the passions and produce a powerful excitement ; and many a genuine revival, I have no doubt, has in this way degenerated into the wildest fanaticism. Nervous sensibility, pouring itself out in tears and

groans and shouting, is not conviction, nor conversion, though often mistaken for both. A breathless silence, under the simple exhibition of divine truth, as if the day of judgment was just at hand, is a much surer indication of the presence and striving of the Spirit, than those swoonings and out-cries, which are sometimes encouraged by professed revival preachers. A judicious pastor, who is at all acquainted with the history of the church, and the philosophy of the human mind, will be so far from trying to work upon the sympathies of his audience, especially when a single spark might kindle them into a flame, that he will hold them in check as long as he can. And if you ask him, why he is so much afraid of high *excitement*, he will tell you, it is because it is so apt to be mistaken for *conviction*, and because it unfits the awakened sinner for taking those discriminating and rational views of divine truth, which are in the highest degree important, if not absolutely essential to his conversion. Till sinners are brought to realize their danger, there is no hope of their “fleeing from the wrath to come;” but the more self-possessed they can be kept, the more will they be profited by sound scriptural instruction, and the less likely will they be to take up with a false hope.

Some celebrated revival preachers make conversion one of the easiest things in the world. They tell the sinner, that he can submit to God and become a christian, just as easy as he can rise from his seat or turn over his hand. It is a simple act of the *will*. He has only to *resolve*, that he will turn right about—that he will renounce the world and serve the Lord,

and the thing is done. He is a christian, and may “go on his way rejoicing.” This is a very short method, certainly, and extremely well calculated to allay the fears of the sinner, if he can be made to believe it. He will be likely, either to form the resolution in his own strength, and so settle down upon a false hope, or to say in his heart, “if it is so easy a thing to repent, then I can repent at any future time, just as well as now, and I will give myself no more trouble about it. Surely one of the easiest things in the world may be done, though it should be postponed to the very last hour of life.”

But where do these preachers get their authority for saying, that it is so easy for one to “break off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by turning unto God?” Do they find it in the Bible? Where—in what book, or chapter, either of the Old Testament, or the New? Sinners are certainly in many places *commanded* to repent. Salvation is offered to the vilest, without money and without price, and we are abundantly taught, that there is nothing but their own voluntary depravity, in the way of their accepting the offer. They may have the pearl of great price, if they will take it as a gift. But all this is very different from saying, that it is an *easy* thing for the enemies of God to become his friends; for those who are “dead in trespasses and sins to wake and rise from the dead, that Christ may give them life.”

The truth is, that the Scriptures represent it, not as the easiest, but as one of the hardest things in the world, to turn from the love and practice of sin, to the love and practice of holiness. “Can the Ethio-

pean change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye, who are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well." "A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." "An evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil." "No man can come to me except the father who hath sent me draw him." "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." I might quote many other passages of the same import, but these are sufficient to prove, that it is a hard thing for a sinner to comply with the offers of the gospel, and become reconciled to God—so hard, that without divine assistance no one will ever repent. Let those who represent to the awakened sinner, that it is perfectly easy, tell him in what *sense* it is easy. If they explain their meaning to be that there is nothing in the way but his own rebellious and wicked heart, it is all very true; but is it easy to conquer a wicked and rebellious heart? Ask him and he will reply, "I find it the hardest thing I ever attempted in my life. I would give all I have in the world if I could repent, but I cannot. When you tell me, that nothing hinders but the obstinacy of my own heart, it is the same thing as telling me that nothing hinders, but the greatest of all possible hindrances, for I feel that nothing short of divine power can remove it." This is just what thousands have felt, when under conviction. It is what sinners feel every day, where there are genuine revivals of religion. And I might appeal to "a great cloud of witnesses," in the church militant and the church triumphant, that they found it infinitely hard to re-

pent, till God took away their stony hearts and gave them hearts of flesh. Urge upon the sinner the immediate duty of repentance, as if you was pleading with him to escape from a burning house. You cannot be too importunate. Tell him, he is entirely inexcusable for remaining impenitent a single moment, since there is nothing in the way but his own criminal backwardness; but do not tell him it is an easy thing to repent. If he knows any thing about "the plague of his own heart," he will not, he cannot believe you; and if he has never felt it, you will in all probability lull him into a fatal stupidity.

As you will sometimes hear preachers calling upon sinners to *repent*, without ever clearly explaining what they mean by repentance, so you will hear them ringing all the changes they can think of, upon the word *submission*. "You are rebels. You must submit. You must throw down your arms. Have you submitted? When will you submit? If you do not submit, you must perish;" and much more to the same purpose. Now I do not object to such appeals, when properly explained, although it should be borne in mind by every preacher that this is not the phraseology in which Christ and his Apostles addressed their impenitent hearers. It was, "*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. *Repent* and believe the gospel. God now commandeth all men everywhere to *repent*." Urging sinners to submit, to submit, to *submit*, without showing them clearly what true gospel submission is, and how it differs from supreme selfishness, is moving in a circle, and I am afraid that many, under such preaching, think

they have submitted, without understanding the true meaning of the term, and while their hearts are as full of rebellion as ever.

Some preachers are afraid to tell the sinner, after having earnestly exhorted him to repent, that he is entirely dependent upon the Holy Spirit for a new heart, lest he should be discouraged, and charge them with contradicting in one sermon, what they had said in another. But what contradiction, or inconsistency is there, between the two propositions, that it is the sinner's immediate duty to repent, and that nothing short of the power of God will ever bring him to repentance? It is perfectly true, that nothing but his own desperate depravity hinders him—that he *might* repent if he *would*. It is perfectly true, also, that God alone can subdue and melt his stubborn heart. In other words, the only thing which makes Divine efficiency necessary is, he is so obstinate and wicked, that nothing short of Almighty power can ever bring him to the foot of the cross.

And to this point, my son, you must bring him; here you must shut him up, or he will escape you. Till he is convinced of the total depravity of his heart; till he is brought to see that this affords him no excuse for his impenitence, and to despair of ever helping himself, there is no ground to hope that he will smite upon his breast with the publican, and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Preach to him so as to make him believe, that with his wicked heart he can repent, whenever he pleases, and he will either dismiss his fears, or embrace a false hope. On the other hand, preach to him so as to make him

believe, that he has *no* power to repent, and he will make no effort. He will sit stupidly down, and “wait God’s time” to convert him. He must be made to see and feel that he is *helpless*, and that his helplessness is *criminal*, before he will cast himself upon the mercy of God, through a Redeemer.

I cannot dismiss this topic without quoting a paragraph from Dr. Griffin’s letter to Dr. Sprague in 1832.

“Sinners have been constantly urged to immediate repentance, and every excuse has been taken away. At the same time we have not denied or concealed their dependence, for the sake of convincing them of their obligations. On the contrary, we have esteemed it vital to urge that dependence, in order to drive them from all reliance on their own strength, and to make them *die* to every hope from themselves. All that you can possibly gain by flattering their independence, is to extort a confession of their *obligations*; for as to matter of fact, they *will not* submit until they are made willing in the day of God’s power. And if you can fasten upon them their obligations, without that falsehood which robs God of his glory, pray let it be done. This we have found it possible to do. We have shown them that their obligations rest on their faculties, and are as reasonable and as complete as though the thing required was merely to walk across the floor; that their faculties constitute a natural ability, that is, *a full power to love and serve God if their hearts were well disposed*, leaving nothing in the way but a bad heart, for which they are wholly to blame if there is any blame in the

universe ; that sin can rest no where but in the heart, and that if you drive it beyond the heart you drive it out of existence ; that *they alone* create the necessity for God to conquer them, and to decide whether he will conquer them or not ; that it is an everlasting blot on creation that God has to speak a second time to induce creatures to love him, much more that he has to constrain them by his conquering power ; and yet after all his provisions and invitations,—after he has sent his Son and his Spirit to save them,—after he has opened the door wide and stands with open arms to receive them,—they will still break their way to perdition if his almighty power do not prevent ; that by their own fatal obstinacy they are cast entirely upon his will ; that they are wholly in his hands ;—that if he frown they die, if he smile they live forever. This is the grandest of all means to press them out of themselves, to cast them dead and helpless upon God, to make them *die* that they may be made alive. Conceal their dependence in order to make them feel their obligations ! The maddest purpose that ever was conceived, unless the thing required is to be done in their own strength. If there is any truth sweeter than all the rest, it is this, that we are absolutely, totally, and eternally dependent on God's sanctifying grace, and that he will have all the glory ;—if any view of God more supporting and encouraging than all the rest, it is that which the Christian takes when he feelingly says, “ My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him.” Take any thing else away, but take not away my God. This is the last truth that I will give up

till I yield my reason and my immortal hopes. If there is any truth in defence of which I would go on a crusade,—or, better still, in support of which I would go to the stake,—it is this. If you see this denial shut up heaven, and then, instead of the Holy Ghost, you see revivals carried on by human devices operating on the passions, there is more cause to mourn than to rejoice.”

Without wishing to bind you to any particular arrangement of subjects in your preaching, in the present interesting state of your congregation, I would advise you to mark out a plan, corresponding as nearly as may be, with the operations of the Holy Spirit, in the several stages of awakening, conviction and conversion. I believe every pastor, who has had much experience in revivals, will tell you that he has found great advantage in being somewhat systematical in bringing forward appropriate subjects. When sinners first begin to enquire or are yet stupid, they need one class of discourses; when they are thoroughly awakened, another, and when they are beginning to indulge hope, another. The first object is to alarm them and gain their attention. The next is to convince them of their guilt and desert of endless punishment. The next, to bring them to Christ as the only Saviour. I will here put down some of the texts, and as nearly as I can in their proper order, which strike my mind as very appropriate.

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

“Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

“Because I have called and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded, I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh.”

“How long halt ye between two opinions?”

“To-day, after so long a time, as it is said, to-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

“What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

“Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.”

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?”

“Quench not the Spirit.”

“The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”

“They made light of it.”

“They all with one consent began to make excuse.”

“What more could I have done to my vineyard that I have not done in it?”

“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

“God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.”

“What must I do to be saved?”

“ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

“ I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.”

“ The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.”

“ The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it.”

“ Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

“ Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves.”

I have put down the foregoing texts, as an outline of the topics which should be dwelt upon with great faithfulness in every revival of religion. A hundred others equally appropriate might be added. But after all, you must watch the progress of the work from day to day as a good physician watches the symptoms of an epidemic disease, and bring forward, one after another, those subjects which the existing state of things seems most immediately to require. I have known revivals advance so rapidly that it was difficult to keep up with them; but we *must* keep up with them, or lose much of the ripening harvest. When a revival has been going on for some months, and many are rejoicing in hope, it is often necessary to go back, as it were, after those who are lingering far behind, or who have not been moved at all; and then the same kind of preaching is wanted, which was called for at the commencement of the revival. More attention than is commonly given

to this point would, I have no doubt, by the blessing of God often prolong the work of grace and multiply the number of converts.

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XXXI.

MY DEAR E.

IF the present happy revival should spread throughout your congregation, as I hope it may, you will have even more to do out of the pulpit than in. Though it would not be possible for you to attend all the neighborhood and more general prayer meetings, your approbation and advice, I take it for granted, will be sought for with reference to their frequency, their length, and the manner of conducting them; and you will wish to be present as often as you can. Enquirers will, not improbably, be calling upon you almost every hour of the day. Interesting cases of awakening and conviction will require your special attention, and sometimes a great deal of it. Twenty families will want to see you in an afternoon, and will feel as if they could not be denied. You will probably be sent for in the night, as I have been, to visit persons in the greatest distress for their souls. You will have to talk with the awakened, hour after hour and day after day, till you have no more strength left; and after the utmost you can do, will feel, that more than you have been able to accomplish is left undone.

As you are a frail dying man, and there are limits beyond which you cannot go without breaking down, a great deal will depend upon the arrangements which you make, to enlist the officers of your church

and other intelligent and discreet members in the work, and to lay out your own strength in the most economical manner. Though you cannot attend all the religious meetings in person, you will be able, I presume, to keep them under the direction of those in whose discretion, piety and experience you have confidence, and who by conversing freely with their neighbors, both in and out of the church, will be able to keep you advised of the state of things in all parts of the parish. This is a point of great importance. A pastor ought, if possible, in the height of a revival, to be made fully acquainted every day with its progress, that he may know how to preach on the Sabbath and where his other labors are most wanted.

If your time and strength would allow you to converse with each enquirer privately and often enough, either in your own study or at home, this might be the best way; but where fifty, or a hundred, are deeply anxious at once, it is entirely impracticable. Were you to spend every moment in this way, it would not be enough. You must resort to some plan for bringing those together, more or less frequently, who desire and need your advice. I know not how many plans have been tried for saving time, but the following are among the most common, at least in this part of the country. Sometimes those who are awakened are requested to remain in their seats, after the congregation have retired, that they may be prayed with and addressed collectively, or conversed with individually by the pastor. Sometimes they are requested to retire from the church to the lecture room, for the same purpose. Sometimes the pastor at the

close of the public exercises, invites all who wish for personal conversation to come to his own house on Sabbath evening. At others, when the number is large, he appoints an enquiry meeting, to be held in some convenient place, on Monday, or Tuesday evening. And sometimes for convenience sake, the enquirers in different neighborhoods, are invited to meet the pastor in one of their own houses. These invitations are more or less restricted, according to the judgment of different ministers. Some invite only those who are already anxious, and have made up their minds to seek salvation, let who will neglect it; while others extend the invitation to all, whether they feel any religious concern or not. Some spend the time chiefly in general exhortation and prayer, and often invite such as wish for personal conversation to stay after the meeting is closed. Others address individuals personally, and ask them questions loud enough to be heard by all; while others pass round from seat to seat, spending from one to five minutes with each individual, conversing in a low whisper.

Without advising you to adopt either of these plans, to the exclusion of all the rest, I will just mention the course which I used to pursue, and which I should pursue again under similar circumstances. In the early part of the revival, and while the enquirers were but few, I met them in a way not to excite any particular observation. When the work had advanced so far, that I was convinced a pretty large number would attend, I appointed an enquiry meeting from the desk, to be held on Monday evening, and continued it from week to week, as long as the

revival lasted. Sabbath evening was not selected, because we commonly had preaching, and after three public services many were too much exhausted, both in body and mind, to be profited by any further instruction. Monday evening was chosen, as being nearest to the Sabbath; for in those days, we relied more on the Sabbath, to advance the revival and bring in new enquirers, than any other day of the week. My invitations were confined to those who were more or less anxious; and whatever advantage others may possibly derive from attending, I have seen more than one enquiry meeting chilled, and in my judgment spoiled, by their presence. It makes a wonderful difference in the effect, whether the majority are deeply impressed, or but little interested, if interested at all.

My manner of conducting these meetings was, after a short prayer and a short address, to pass round and speak to each individual in a whisper, which could rarely be heard by any other person; and in this way I ascertained the feelings of from thirty to fifty persons, within the hour and a half. When the number of enquirers was much larger, I invited some ministerial brother to come in and assist me. When any important thought was suggested by the answers which my questions elicited, I was in the habit of throwing it out to the meeting, as briefly as possible, and then passing on. Whenever I found a case requiring special attention, I reserved it for an early interview elsewhere. Besides these general enquiry meetings, I appointed smaller ones, when the state of things seemed to demand it; and found them

very useful, while much time was saved, which it would have cost me, to go from house to house.

Much has been said, within a few years past, for and against "new measures," and you will probably expect something from me on this controverted subject. My own views are perhaps somewhat peculiar. I neither approve of new measures *as such*, nor condemn them. I care not whether a measure be *new* or *old*, provided it be scriptural and well adapted to bring sinners to repentance, and to build up the church upon "the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." Five and twenty years ago, enquiry meetings, as they are now generally conducted, and female prayer meetings, were new measures; and I think it not unlikely, that as revivals become more frequent and powerful, other measures, which have not yet been thought of, will be adopted with great success. While therefore I feel constrained to express my strong disapprobation of some of the measures which have been introduced by certain "revivalists" in different parts of the country, it is not because they are *new*. It is because I think their direct tendency is to corrupt revivals, and fill the churches with false professors.

One of these measures is, calling on sinners to rise and "commit themselves," before the whole congregation. This is done under the impression, that if you can induce a person to take such a step, he will be more likely to become a christian than if he were left to his own meditations, and to be conversed with privately by the pastor. It may be so in some

instances ; and if the essence of religion consisted in pledges and external observances, a great point would certainly be gained, by persuading as many as possible thus to commit themselves. But men's rising in different parts of the house to be prayed for is not repentance, and is not understood to be, either by them or the preacher. It is at most a public announcement, that they are willing to be regarded as enquirers. Now is there the slightest intimation in the New Testament, that the Apostles or other primitive preachers ever adopted any such measure ? Did they ever call upon such of their hearers as were awakened under their sermons, to rise and be prayed for as enquirers, or in any way to pledge themselves that they would attend to the gospel message ? Did they not always come directly to the point ? " Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." " Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." There is great danger, when you persuade a man who is not yet converted, publicly to commit himself, that he will be induced by other than religious feelings and motives, to persevere and come into the church, and hang as a dead weight upon the cause. The pride of consistency in whatever men publicly pledge themselves to, will often carry them much further than their principles would have carried them. I am satisfied, that in general those conversions are most to be depended upon, which excite the least public observation in the process which precedes them.

Another measure, which seems to me still more

objectionable, is, calling persons forward to the "anxious seats." Even if nothing more were done, than simply to invite such as are seriously impressed to come out from the congregation, and take seats specially provided for them near the pulpit, I should regard it as a measure of more than doubtful expediency. But when they are urged, and entreated, and addressed individually, and almost forced to come forward, I cannot help regarding it as unauthorized and highly exceptionable. As two venerable fathers of the Presbyterian Church have, in the Appendix to Dr. Sprague's Letters on Revivals, so well expressed my own views on this important subject, I am happy to avail myself of the substance of their remarks in this communication.

"Far be it from me," says Dr. Miller, p. 37, "to pronounce a sentence of condemnation on those brethren, who have thought it their duty to countenance *anxious seats*, or to question that good has sometimes been done, where they have been used. But the decisive question is, can this method of proceeding be considered as the best mode, nay as a really eligible mode, of drawing to a point and ascertaining the exercises of serious enquirers? Is it the best way of testing the deliberate purpose of persons whose attention has been aroused for the first time perhaps, only a few minutes before, to the great subject of religion? It would by no means occur to me, as the most judicious way in ordinary cases, of drawing the line between the careless and the truly anxious enquirer, to request all who were disposed to think seriously, to rise and present themselves before

a public assembly, and this, perhaps, at the very close of the sermon, by means of which, it was hoped they had for the first time begun to feel and enquire about salvation, and of course, in a few minutes after they thus began to feel. I should expect the persons rising and presenting themselves, to be, for the most part, the forward, the sanguine, the rash, the self-confident, and the self-righteous ; and that many who kept their seats would prove to be the modest, the humble, the broken hearted.

“I know it is urged, that the awakened should be prevailed upon to “commit themselves” as soon as possible. But suppose, after a solemn and pointed sermon, an invitation to be given to all present, who felt the importance of an immediate attention to the things which belong to their peace, to come forward and take the seats provided for them near the pulpit. Suppose *two hundred* to present themselves, as objects of attention and prayer. And suppose at the end of three months, *fifty* of these to unite themselves with the church, on the ground of “a good hope through grace”—*fifty* more to take the same step, not because they were satisfied of their christian character, but because they had “committed themselves,” and did not wish to appear fickle, or apostates : and the remaining *hundred* to return with greater obduracy than before to their former sinful course. Would it be, upon the whole, more favorable to the interests of the Redeemer’s kingdom, than if, in pursuance of what are called the *old measures*, none but the *fifty* genuine converts had ever been brought forward to public view at all, and not even these, till they had

had opportunity to bring their exercises to the test of time—to count the cost of the undertaking? The church, indeed, in the latter case, might not grow in numbers quite so rapidly; but she would be less burdened with spurious members, and much less in danger of placing the *fifty* who insincerely took upon themselves the vows of Christ, and the *hundred* who drew back, in a state far more perilous than ever, in regard to their final salvation.

“Let it not be said, that inviting to anxious seats is the only effectual method of ascertaining who are under serious impressions and who are not. Why not invite all who are anxious to remain after the congregation is dismissed, or to meet their pastor the next evening for the purpose of disclosing their feelings, and being made the subjects of instruction and prayer? It surely affords a far better opportunity to give appropriate instruction. It prevents the mischief of dragging those into public view whose exercises are immature. And it avoids the danger, which to many, and especially to young people, may be very formidable; I mean the danger of being inflated by becoming objects of public attention, and by being forthwith addressed and announced as undoubted “converts.”

“To anxious seats, (a strange appellation,) in a promiscuous congregation,” says Dr. Green, p. 138, “on which the awakened and alarmed are placed by themselves to be addressed and prayed for, and to be gazed at by the whole assembly, I confess I am not friendly. I do not deny, that they may have been used without injury, perhaps with some advan-

tage, in certain places and on particular occasions. But as a general measure, they seem to me unnecessary and seriously objectionable. There is an ostentation about them, in an indiscriminate assemblage, which I am persuaded keeps some back who are laboring in spirit, and brings others there who feel very little ; and the use of these seats has, I think, been, in some places, the first step to ulterior proceedings of a very exceptionable character."

I am sensible, my dear E., that these views will be regarded by some as quite too *conservative* for this enlightened age ; and I am not prepared to say that I would under *no* circumstances consent to use the "anxious seats ;" but if I found public opinion in favor of them too strong to be resisted, I should think it my bounden duty to do what I could, to change that opinion as soon and as fast as practicable. I am perfectly satisfied, that nearly all the congregations in New England and New York, which have been subjected to this high pressure system have been injured by it : and there is reason to fear, that many of the churches will not recover from it for half a century to come. Dear bought experience, however, has wrought such a change, in many places where "anxious seats" with their concomitants were once highly popular, that I believe neither ministers nor people would on any account consent to have them introduced again. The danger now is, that some will go into the opposite extreme, and discard even the safest and best means for carrying on revivals.

Calling upon females to pray and exhort in promiscuous meetings is another measure, which,

whether new or old, I think ought to be discountenanced everywhere, as contrary to scripture, and subversive of the order which infinite wisdom has established in the kingdom of Christ. "Every thing is beautiful" in its proper place, as well as "in its season." There is nothing which woman cannot do in her own appropriate sphere ; but out of it, the sweet attraction ceases at once.

One other highly objectionable measure, which I feel bound to testify against, is, *hasty admissions into the church*. I refer to cases where, in the height of a revival, persons, who at the beginning of the week were perfectly careless, perhaps quite immoral, are awakened, converted, examined, received into the church and on the next Sabbath admitted to the Lord's Supper. I confess there is nothing which shocks my feelings like this, in the whole catalogue of measures, whether new or old. Not because I have any doubt that many of these persons are truly converted, but because there is every reason to fear, that many of them are not ; and no time is allowed any of them to "examine themselves, whether they are in the faith." Under this system the churches may be enlarged, but they cannot be strengthened. Numbers will find, when the excitement is over, that they have no religion, and will regret that they ever made a profession. Others will "return, like the dog to his vomit, and like a sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire ;" and others, mistaking "the form of godliness for the power," will settle down upon a false hope. I believe that if this system were to be generally adopted, there would, in two

or three generations, be very little besides the "form" left in the churches. I know very well, that the advocates of the measure strive to justify it by appealing to apostolic example. But the cases are so dissimilar that there is no safety in arguing from one to the other.

"Often," says Dr. Alexander, in the Appendix to Sprague's Lectures, p. 2., "often the impressions produced at a public meeting, where strong excitements are applied to awaken the feelings, are as evanescent as the morning cloud or early dew. And many of those who become truly pious, entertain for a while hopes, which they are afterwards convinced to be unfounded; and to pronounce such persons converted at once, and hurry their admission to the Lord's table, would be the most effectual method of preventing their saving conversion. There may be an error on the other side, of too long a delay, but the error is on the safest side. As for apostolical precedent, it is just as strong for a community of goods; and after all there is no undoubted case of any convert being immediately received to the Lord's Supper. They were baptized instantly on their profession; but this, in our view, is a different thing; for we admit infants to baptism, but not to the other sacrament.

"It is a great error," says Dr. Hawes, p. 59, "to admit converts to the church, before time has been allowed to try the sincerity of their hope. This is an error into which I was betrayed during the first revival among my people, and it cost me bitter repentance. And yet none were admitted under two months after they had indulged a hope."

“I am aware,” says Dr. Milledoler, p. 106, “that apostolic example is offered as a plea for this hurried operation. But it appears to me, the two cases are extremely dissimilar. To mention no other point of difference, the persons who embraced christianity at that period, did so in opposition to all their former prejudices and habits, and at the sacrifice of all their worldly comforts and prospects. Unless, therefore, ministers and ruling elders will run the risk of filling the church with mere nominal professors, at the expense of diminishing its actual strength and purity, they ought to take time to know their converts, or at least, to give the converts time to know something of themselves, and of God’s truth.”

These views seem to me sound and judicious. To hurry persons of ardent temperament into the church and to the communion table, in a day or two, or even a week or two after their supposed conversion, for the sake of counting numbers, to prevent them from being drawn into some rival communion, or for fear that if they do not join at once, they never will, is assuming a responsibility which I should not dare to take. I cannot regard it in any other light than as trifling with gospel institutions, and endangering the souls of men. What if multitudes should be deceived and lost by means of this haste? Who will have to answer for it? Will their spiritual advisers be found innocent? I am persuaded, moreover, that there are hundreds, if not thousands, at this moment in churches thus constituted, who are convinced they have experienced no radical change, and regret that they ever made a profession. But they are in the

church, and what can they do? The evangelist insisted upon their being admitted, and the pastors yielded.

We are sometimes told, that there are not more open apostasies among those who are thus hastily admitted, and where the whole machinery of "new measures" has been employed, than where "old measures" have been used, and the candidates have been required to undergo a probation of several months. I think this must be a mistake. But supposing it correct, it does not prove that as great a proportion of the former give evidence of true and saving conversion as of the latter. It would be strange indeed, if those who were strictly moral before they joined the church, were to forfeit their standing by falling into gross and open sins afterwards. Probably cases of discipline for scandalous offences were not more frequent in the churches of Massachusetts, when none but church members were eligible to civil office, or even allowed to vote for rulers, than there are now? But who can question, that the system must have brought in a multitude of false professors? And so of these hasty admissions under high excitement. The tendency is to fill the churches with spurious converts.

I know there is an opposite extreme, and I should be sorry to have you fall into it. When persons of adult years have been on probation long enough, to give credible evidence of a spiritual and radical change of heart, they ought to be admitted to the Lord's Supper. It will necessarily require more time for some to furnish this evidence than others, accord-

ing to their previous opportunities, habits, and characters. A Sandwich Islander ought to be put off longer than a respectable member of a christian congregation, and a converted inebriate cannot safely be admitted so soon as if he had always been perfectly sober. There is less danger in too long a delay, than in too much haste, though the former extreme should be guarded against, as well as the latter. From *three* to *six*, and in some cases *twelve* months probation, cannot be regarded as unreasonably protracted.

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XXXII.

MY DEAR E.

I have a few suggestions more to offer, with respect to *the manner of conducting revivals*. While your meetings should generally be open to everybody, who can be persuaded to attend, there are some decided advantages in occasionally meeting different classes of the unconverted by themselves. You can address them with more freedom apart, and adapt your remarks better to their peculiar circumstances, than in a promiscuous assembly. It will require but very few experiments, fully to convince you of this. Some of your congregation you will find it very difficult to reach in any other way. Men in active business will be apt to excuse themselves by the plea, that your meetings and their necessary engagements often interfere. This objection you can obviate, by ascertaining when they are most at leisure, and making particular appointments to suit their convenience. I shall always remember a weekly meeting of this sort, for merchants and other business men, in the city of B——, which I had the privilege of attending some twenty years ago, while assisting a respected brother in a revival. A large number met in rotation at each others houses, and I believe a majority of them ultimately professed religion.

What are sometimes called *parlor* meetings for ladies have also been found highly useful in large

towns like L——. Many individuals have been induced to attend such meetings, and have been savingly benefited, who could not otherwise have been brought out to hear the gospel.

During the great revival in P——, to which allusion has already been made, I held a stated meeting for some time at my own house, for the *aged* of my congregation, who were not professors, and I believe much good was done, which could hardly have been hoped for, had no such meeting been established.

During a revival, much more depends upon what would be called *little* things, than is generally supposed. Mr. N——, who understood this whole subject better than any other man I ever knew, and whose labors were wonderfully blessed for fifteen years or more, till his health failed, used to advise the people at the close of his meetings to go home as still as possible—to say nothing to each other on the way, about the sermon, or anything else, but to “commune with their own hearts and be still.” There was philosophy as well as religion in this advice. Many, I have no doubt, talk away religious impressions with their companions, before they get home, who might have them deepened and made permanent by silent reflection. Mr. N—— would rarely close his most solemn evening meetings with singing, because, he said, it was apt to divert the thoughts of enquirers from the sermon.

Never protract your meetings to a *late hour* in the evening. Dismiss the people in season for family and secret devotions, before they retire to rest, and so that they may retire and rise early. No part of

the day is worth so much to a troubled soul, as the morning, when the nerves are composed and the mind is clear.

When young friends and companions are simultaneously awakened, advise them to suspend their social intercourse, till the great question is settled. They can neither help, nor instruct each other. It is at best "the blind leading the blind." By conversing together and "comparing themselves among themselves," they are much more likely to get bewildered, and lose their impressions, than to find the path to heaven. I knew a case, in which several young females were awakened under the same sermon, and who, instead of going home to their chambers, sat down and wept together till their alarm nearly subsided, and in a few days they were as stupid as ever. Nothing can be more unprofitable, and hardly any thing can be more dangerous, than for anxious sinners to spend much time in condoling with one another. Their chief intercourse should be with their pastor and other judicious christian friends.

The length of your several interviews with the careless and the awakened, during a revival, should vary indefinitely according to the state in which you find them. Sometimes you will find it necessary to say a great deal, and at others very little ; and you can never determine how much, before hand. I once called upon a very intelligent member of my congregation about eight o'clock in the morning, intending to say a few words to him about what the Lord was doing in the place, and pass on. I did

not know that his mind was at all impressed. But I found him in such a peculiar state, that I could not safely leave him till nearly noon. The Spirit of God was evidently beginning to strive with him, but nothing was right within, or without. He was prepared to dispute every inch of ground. It seemed, at first, as if there would be no end of his cavilling. As soon as one objection was answered, or one excuse was taken away, he had another ready. He saw that he could not stand against the claims and denunciations of God's law, but he fought on the retreat, if I may so express it, like a chafed lion. It was encouraging, however, to find that every argument and appeal told upon his conscience. He yielded one position after another, till at his own request we were upon our knees at the throne of grace in his behalf. From that time his distress increased, till he found relief by unconditional submission, as he hoped, to God. Had this man been left at the end of the first or the second hour, he would have felt as if he had gained the victory, and might have held out to his dying day.

Sometimes, where you expected to have a hard struggle, you will find that the Spirit of the Lord has gone before you, and taken away every excuse, so that very little needs to be said. Your delightful privilege will be rather, to "stand still and see the salvation of God."

In the progress of a revival, you ought to see awakened and enquiring sinners as often as once in two or three days, if possible ; so as to follow up every good impression which may have been made,

with suitable exhortations and advice. Many, there is reason to fear, “draw back” and perish, in consequence of being neglected too long, particularly in the critical stages of their religious concern. A lady, now of very devoted piety, has often told me that when her attention was first arrested in a short visit which I made at her father’s house, she has no doubt her impressions would have worn off, if I had not called again the same week.

When you find an awakened sinner in great distress, the first and all important thing is, to ascertain the true cause of his distress. If it arises from an impression that the day of grace is past, that he has committed the unpardonable sin by so long resisting the Spirit, or from any other erroneous view of his condition, he needs instruction. Distress of this sort does no good. Were it to last for a month or a year it would leave him as far from the kingdom of heaven as it found him. Whatever relief, therefore, you can give him by correcting his mistakes, you ought most promptly and cheerfully to render. But if you find that his distress arises from genuine conviction of sin; from clear and scriptural views of the true ground of God’s controversy with him—if it is the “sword of the Spirit, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit, of the joints of the marrow,” beware how you attempt to comfort him. Comfort is not what he needs, but a still deeper sense of his lost and guilty condition. He is yet a rebel, and “there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” The Holy Spirit is striving to bring him to repentance and submission, and he is resisting

with all his might. O, I would not in such a case attempt to take him out of God's hands, by telling him, "you must not be so much distressed; you are not so great a sinner as you imagine; you must not be discouraged; you must wait God's time, &c. &c. I would not thus thrust myself in between God and that rebel, for a thousand worlds. However great may be the agony of his mind, in view of the truth, in view of his inexcusable opposition and of the justice of God in his condemnation, he is still a rebel up to the moment of submission.

Your sympathies would, if indulged, lead you to sooth his troubled spirit; but you must not indulge them. It is your business, as a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ, to co-operate with the Spirit, by making the truth press harder and harder upon the sinner's conscience, till he yields. A parent may entreat you to comfort his child, and tell you that you will certainly drive him to despair, by dwelling upon his guilt and pressing him to immediate repentance. But this is a mistaken view of the case, unless it be, that you will make him despair of ever *helping* himself; and the sooner he can be driven to this, the better. Till he feels that, owing to the hardness and wickedness of his heart, there is no hope but in the mercy of God, he will not give up the contest. I believe it is a remark of President Edwards, that you never need be afraid of pressing the awakened sinner too hard, if it is a clear view of the truth which distresses him. Your finding him in great distress is no reason why you should comfort him. The time has not yet come. The consolations of the gospel are for the

penitent, not for the *impenitent*. That he feels as if he could not live under such agony, is no reason why you should not say that which will increase it. It indicates, that the hour of deliverance is at hand, and the more faithful you are, the sooner it will come.

I can truly say, that nothing rejoices me more in the midst of a revival, than to find sinners in great distress; and to be able, by presenting the naked truth to their minds, to increase that distress instead of alleviating it; and I never knew any one driven to despair, under judicious treatment of this sort. On the contrary, I have seen many, under the most searching and uncompromising appeals, driven from all their false refuges in a few hours, and “brought out of darkness into marvellous light.” I believe that scores are led to embrace false hopes by being soothed and encouraged too soon, where one is permanently injured by being pushed too far.

As soon as the sinner has yielded, as soon as his heart is changed, and he is a true penitent, he is prepared for the consolations of the gospel, but not before. To offer them, while he is yet unsubdued, unreconciled to God, is “healing the hurt slightly.” May God give you wisdom and grace to discover the crisis, and to deal faithfully with awakened sinners, “as one who must give account.” A single case of genuine conversion is worth more than a thousand hopes, hastily taken up, before the stubborn will is subdued—before the heart is really changed.

Sometimes you will meet with lingering cases of concern and enquiry, which will perplex you exceed-

ingly. After you have conversed with the individual, time after time and week after week, till you have nothing more to offer, you will see that he is making no progress. He assents to everything you can say, and his speculative views are all correct, but there he is, without hope, and without having any reasonable ground of hope. He was one of the first to attend your enquiry meetings, and will probably be among the last, and what can you do? In general you will find, upon questioning this class of enquirers closely, that they are not so *anxious* as they suppose themselves to be. It is rather a morbid gloom that has settled down upon their minds, than anything else. Some have been roused from this dreamy state by being honestly told, that it is doubtful whether they have ever had any genuine conviction of sin, and by having the alarm sounded in their ears, as if they had not yet begun to enquire. In point of fact, their situation is more critical than that of many who are yet stupid around them, and if they cannot be startled, there seems to be no hope of their coming into the light and liberty of the gospel.

If you find, as you sometimes probably will, that an awakened sinner is leaning upon you for help, when there is no help but in God, and you have told him so a hundred times, and can give him no further instruction on that point, you must stand out of the way. You must withdraw for a season, till he feels that every prop has failed; that he is in the hands of infinite holiness and justice, and that no finite power in the universe can help him. I knew a lady of this class infinitely more alarmed by being

passed by in an enquiry meeting, than she had ever been by the most earnest and faithful appeals; and another, who had often been visited and had been lingering and looking to the minister for help, brought to the great decision by seeing him, when she expected he would call, repeatedly pass the house as if he had given her up and had no hopes of her conversion. Indeed, cases like these very often occur. I remember one of thrilling interest in this College. A student who had been religiously educated was awakened, and lingered in great distress for some time. I saw him often. He was always glad to meet me, and conversed with uncommon intelligence and freedom. These interviews were continued, till he clearly saw just what he must do, or perish. Still he lingered, and I became satisfied, that he was leaning upon me, a worm of the dust, though he probably was not conscious of it himself. One night he sent for me in great agony of spirit, begging me to come as soon as I could, and tell him what he must do. I had seen him that very day and told him, as I had often done before. I could say no more if I went. He did not need instruction. He knew what he ought to do, but his proud heart would not bow. He wanted something to cling to. It was clear to me, that the Holy Spirit was bringing him to the point, and that human agency would rather interfere with the process, than help it forward. Instead of hastening to his room therefore, I sent him this message, "I would visit you with all my heart, my dear young friend, but I can do you no good. You are in the hands of God, and there I leave you. What

he requires is perfectly reasonable. You know it is; and he never will give up his claim. You must cast yourself unconditionally upon his mercy, through Jesus Christ, or perish." This was a great disappointment, and increased the poor young man's distress exceedingly. He felt as if he was forsaken. The last prop on which he leaned had given way, and he scarcely expected to live till morning; but ere morning came, the struggle was over. He not only saw that God was on the throne, but rejoiced in it. A new song was put into his mouth, and he has long been a humble and zealous preacher of the gospel.

Be infinitely more anxious to have *the work of conviction deep and thorough* in the hearts of awakened sinners, and to witness the evidences of their true conversion, than to have them get *hopes*. The danger in most cases is, they will too soon hope they are born again. Hardly anything is more to be dreaded than a false hope. When an individual, who has been in deep distress, tells you that the load is gone and he has new views and feelings, instead of putting him down at once as a convert, remind him that there is great danger of self-deception. Exhort him to suspend his judgment, till he has time to examine himself, and faithfully to apply the tests of God's holy word. If he has really been renewed by the Holy Spirit, his living without a hope for a few days or weeks will not endanger his salvation; but encouraging him to think he is a christian upon a superficial experience may prove his eternal undoing.

I never love to hear a minister say, in the progress of a revival, that so many have been converted already,—forty, fifty, or any other definite number. “Ten were brought out last week, eight the week before, and twelve are already rejoicing this week, &c. &c.” It is not given us to know the hearts of men in the most powerful revival. Multitudes hear the word with joy who are never converted. The good seed springs up, but it is in “stony places.” There is “no deepness of earth, and when the sun is up, it withereth.” If you count all who get hopes and appear well, as the work advances, you will be sure to overrate the number. Some, in whom you have much confidence, will by and by “fall away.” At the end of three or four months after the supposed conversion of a hundred persons, you must expect to see a considerable number returning to the “beggarly elements of the world,” sorely disappointing their pious friends. And is not this one reason, why certain revivalists, who make the most noise in the country, are so anxious to get their converts into the church as soon as possible? Is it uncharitable to think, that they want to swell the list beyond what they could any how expect to do, if they were to wait for the chaff to blow off?

You do not tell me whether the revival in L—— embraces *children* or not. This is not unfrequently the case, and I have no doubt that many are renewed at a very tender age. But if there is any considerable number of the children of your congregation excited to make the great enquiry, “what shall we do,” I am sure, that while you rejoice to see

them flocking around for advice, it will occasion you a great deal of solicitude. You will find it extremely difficult to determine, how much of the interest which they manifest arises from mere sympathy, and how much from the striving of the Spirit—how much they talk and exhort and pray from imitation, and how much from the impulse of religious feeling. You will often be astonished at the apparent maturity of their views and genuineness of their experience, and will probably look upon that many more of them as truly converted, than really are. A few months will convince you, that much of what appeared so promising was “the morning cloud and the early dew.” Some however will, it is to be hoped, give increasing evidence of a real change of heart, and the question of receiving them into the church, will come up at no distant day. They may wish very much to be admitted, and their friends perhaps will urge it; but I hope you will take time and look at the question in all its bearings, before you give your consent. A great many young people in some parts of the land are now in the churches, who are quite sure they never had any religion, and who exceedingly regret that they were encouraged, or allowed to make a profession at so early an age. It appears to me, the cases are very rare, in which children should be received under *fourteen*; and that it is not safe to admit many, till they are still older. The true way, I cannot help thinking is, to form them into a class of *catechumens*, under such a course of religious instruction, as is best calculated to imbue their minds with the essen-

tial doctrines of the gospel ; to make them acquainted with the nature and evidences of true piety, and to prepare them for admission to the Lord's table, after a suitable probation. Precisely how long they should be kept in the class of catechumens, I am not prepared to say. Doubtless some may be admitted into the church earlier than others ; but I think there is more danger of moving too fast, than too slow.

Although the probation of adults, in general, should be shorter, it seems to me, that as soon as a considerable number have signified a desire to join the church, it is the duty of the pastor to meet them weekly or oftener, for a considerable length of time, for the express purpose of explaining to them the articles of faith, the nature and obligations of the covenant, and for carefully going over the whole ground of christian experience, that they may act with a full understanding of what they believe and promise, when they make a public profession. You will remember, that after the great revival of 1827, in your Junior year, this course was adopted, and it is one which I have always felt it my duty to pursue, both before I came here and since.

But, my dear son, I have no time to enlarge, and am sure that if I had, I could not do full justice to the subject of revivals. It is a great subject. It is an exceedingly difficult subject ; and I rejoice to refer you to much better instruction and advice than I can give you. *President Edwards* has treated it with great discrimination and ability. Next to the Bible, I recommend to you the study of his invaluable narrative of the wonderful work of God in America a

century ago. *Dr. Sprague's* Lectures are well worth your perusal; and the Appendix, consisting of about twenty letters from distinguished ministers of different denominations, you should not fail to have on your table for daily reference. A volume entitled *The Great Awakening*, by the *Rev. Joseph Tracy*, and lately published in Boston, I would likewise warmly recommend to your notice. It is a condensed compilation of great value, and every pastor in the land ought to possess it. That you may be greatly assisted by such helps as you can obtain, and above all, that you may be taught of God, and made eminently wise and successful in winning souls to Christ, is the prayer of

Your Affectionate Father.

LETTER XXXIII.

MY DEAR E.

THERE are several miscellaneous topics of considerable importance, upon which I have not yet touched, and to which I feel bound to devote one or two letters.

The first is, *how ought you to treat opposers*, if there should be any such in your congregation? It would be remarkable indeed, if there should be none to take off the "woe," and if it is desirable you should know who they are, it is quite as important that you should seem not to know anything about it. If they speak against you, have no ear and no memory for it. When you want any little favor, go to them as soon as to any of your best friends. They will rarely refuse you, and no man can long remain the enemy of one whom he is in the habit of obliging. Ask their advice in matters pertaining to their profession or line of business, and follow it as far as you can. If one of this class avoids you, take no notice of it. If, when you meet him, he passes by without seeing you, let him pass on, and the next time you meet him, offer him your hand. In the mean time, if he is in affliction, visit him; if he is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink. It is always right in this way to "heap coals of fire on his head."

The opposite course of assaulting an opposer with your "new ropes and green withs," will never

succeed. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal." It will never do for a minister to keep his check-book, and mark off one after another as personal enemies, the moment he discovers any indications of hostility or dislike. No pastor, however popular at first, or however commanding his talents may be, can hold his place with any sort of comfort for three years, who, when he sees a known or suspected opposer coming on the same side of the street, either meets him with a kind of perpendicular defiance, or, to avoid him, passes over to the other side.

Most of your salary will be expended, as you go along, for the support of your family, and of course you will have occasion to purchase many things of farmers, market-men, merchants, &c. I would advise you to buy of your friends, when it is convenient, and when you can get the article at a fair price. They will rather expect it, and will often put their goods lower than you can get them elsewhere. If any, however, should show a disposition to take advantage of you, either in the sale of goods or in the settlement of accounts, because you are a minister and cannot contend, take care how you put yourself into their power a second time. It may not be prudent to make a word of complaint, but it will always be right to protect yourself against future impositions, by not wanting any thing they may have to sell. Let me advise you rarely to "beat down the price" of any article you wish to purchase, particularly from one of your own congregation. It will expose you to the reproach of being sharp and screwing in a bargain. Better to lose a few dollars in a year, than to get such

a name. If you think the article too dear, leave it, and purchase where you can trade to better advantage, or contrive to do without it for the present. In this way it will soon be known that you understand when you are unfairly dealt by, though you do not choose to notice it.

Be *economical* in your dress, in your living, and in all your family expenditures. Some ministers, as well as other individuals, purchase things which they could very well do without, because they are *cheap*—as when a merchant is selling off his goods at cost, or when old household furniture is sold at auction. If you could have access to their garrets and back sheds, you would find not a little rubbish stowed away here and there, which cost money, but which is of no use whatever. It was a *great bargain*, and that is all the good it will ever do them. Live, if possible, within your income. It is not right for ministers any more than other men, to contract debts, when they have no reasonable prospect of being able to pay. If their salaries are inadequate, and their people able to give them more, and will not, it may be a good reason for going where they can be supported, but not for throwing the burden upon creditors, nor for embarrassing their own families, after they themselves are dead. Better to live on very plain food, and to deny themselves many conveniences.

But while I strongly recommend economy, there are limits beyond which a minister cannot go without exposing himself to the charge of parsimony, and in this way impairing his usefulness. There is a style of living, of dress, of furniture and the like, in every

parish, which is regarded as *respectable*, and it will not do for the clergyman and his family to fall below it. He must wear a decent coat, and live in a decent house, and set a decent table, and entertain his brethren decently, when they call to see him, or he will lose the respect of his own people, and with it the power of doing them good. I call that minister *economical*, who makes the most of his income within the limits of convenience and respectability ; who brings up his children in habits of industry and economy ; who is saving without being parsimonious, and generous at the expense, not only of superfluities, but of some conveniences. If he is known to have other considerable sources of income besides his salary, he may indulge himself more, always maintaining a conscientious regard, however, to the effect of his example, and taking care rather to fall below the amount which he might annually expend and keep within bounds, than to exceed it. But I must hasten to another topic.

Use hospitality. In genuine hospitality there is nothing inconsistent with strict economy. Here you must be an example to your flock. As long as you have a loaf to divide with your wayfaring brother, make him welcome to your table. “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers ; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” I know it may be said, that this is laying a heavy tax upon the ministry, and opening a wide door for imposition. Drones, we shall be told, there are among preachers, as well as other classes of men—candidates whose services nobody wants, and who will be sure to tax your hospi-

tality beyond all reasonable endurance. This I cannot take upon myself to deny, nor that in soliciting subscriptions for their own benefit, the publishers of religious books and their agents may sometimes make themselves inconveniently welcome in the families of poor clergymen. But you must not make too much of cases like these, lest it should be ascribed to covetousness. Some of the very men who complain that their pastor impoverishes his own family, or taxes his parish by keeping a great ministerial tavern, would be the last to commend him for closing his doors against such customers, and setting a smaller table. Indeed, who is there that does not, after all, love to see his minister hospitable; and how reproachful to the clerical profession would be the contrary example. Better to wear and brush your coat a few months longer; better to make the well worn furniture or family vehicle do for another year, better, when you have no company, to content yourself with rather plainer fare than you could wish, to eat coarser bread and use less coffee, butter, sugar, &c. than not to have a plate and a bed always ready for a friend or a respectable stranger.

“Ministering to the necessities” of the virtuous and pious poor, is another duty which devolves upon you as a christian pastor. Benevolent members of your church and congregation will sometimes make you the almoner of their bounty, but not often enough to excuse you from laying aside something from your own income. When you are going to visit an indigent family, particularly in sickness, try to think of some little comfort to carry along with

you. If you find that anything is wanted, which they have no means of getting, leave them something to purchase it with, or else send it by a trusty hand, as soon as you get home. It is impossible to specify the amount which you ought annually to give to the poor, or how much at any one time. This must depend partly upon your ability, and partly upon their characters and necessities. The *virtuous* and *industrious* poor have the first and highest claim; and it will depend on circumstances, whether the idle and vicious have any claim at all. Every dollar you lay out judiciously in this department of benevolent action, will be better invested, than if you had lent it upon bond and mortgage, at a hundred per cent.

I must not omit to add, that those great christian enterprises, which are the glory of the present age, will have imperative claims upon you as a minister and a christian. You may not be called upon by your Divine Master to go and set up the standard of the cross on a heathen shore, and the utmost you can give will be but a mite in comparison to what is demanded for the conversion of the world. But remember, my dear son, that God will hold you responsible for whatever influence you can exert, to bring up the church to the standard of her duty. The ministers of that glorious gospel, which they are commissioned to preach at home, and which must be preached to all nations, before they can be converted, have it in their power to do more towards raising the necessary funds, than any other class of men—might I not add, more than *all* other classes

put together. Perhaps this would be extravagant ; but let any one consider the position which pastors occupy, the access which they have to the hearts and consciences of the whole christian community, and the influence which they actually wield in all the religious movements of the age, and he may perhaps be convinced, that I should not be far out of the way. Point me to the churches which are doing most in proportion to their ability for the spread of the gospel, and without knowing the names of their pastors, or ever having heard of their moving a finger, I am prepared to say, that it is greatly through their influence, or that of those who immediately preceded them in the same office. On the other hand, where there is a dead church, and next to nothing is cast into the treasury of the Lord, depend upon it, the pastor, if they have one, and unless he has lately come among them, is exceedingly remiss in his duty, and nothing better can reasonably be expected, till he bestirs himself. If three quarters of a million of dollars is contributed annually in this country to support the cause of missions in its various departments, I have no doubt, three fourths of the money at least comes through the direct and indirect agency of the christian ministry ; and if ministers of all denominations were to do their whole duty, and exert all their influence, I have as little doubt, that the contributions of the church would be doubled in a short time.

Do you ask me how this mighty influence is to be exerted ?—I will tell you. If you have a truly benevolent and missionary spirit yourself, you will infuse it into others. You will press the subject upon

the members of your church in private conversation ; you will advise and persuade them to take religious magazines and newspapers ; you will induce as many of them as you can to attend the monthly concert ; and in order to make it as interesting as possible, you will diligently collect and arrange the latest missionary intelligence ; will exhibit maps of various countries and stations where the light begins to shine, and will lay yourself out so thoroughly in preparing for the concert, as not only to show how deeply your own heart is interested in the cause, but to make every christian feel that he sustains a great loss in staying away. You will also frequently plead the cause of the Bible and of missions, with all the eloquence of which you are master, before your whole congregation, and will make the salvation of the heathen a subject of prayer every Sabbath day, from the beginning of the year to the end of it. These, my son, are some of the ways in which you can make your influence felt to the ends of the earth, to the end of time, and through everlasting ages.

But you must not rest here. You must enforce your precepts by your own liberal example. You must *give*, as well as exhort others to give, and you must give more in proportion to your ability than others do, or you will not be likely to bring them up to a high standard. You must in this way stir them up to a holy emulation. Be it, that some are unreasonable, and require more of their ministers than they can spare from their small salaries. This is always to be expected. But while they can hardly hope to satisfy everybody, and should “consider it

a small thing to be judged of man's judgment," let them "devise liberal things,"—so liberal, as "to provoke many to love and good works," who might otherwise do little or nothing.

I am very affectionately, &c.

LETTER XXXIV.

MY DEAR E.

I am afraid you will think me too minute, if not quite tedious in my paternal advice ; but there are a few suggestions more which I wish to make, before I close this series of letters.

And *first*, let your *ministerial example* sustain and enforce your *preaching*. Beware that you never suffer the laxness of the former to depress the standard of the latter. This I fear is sometimes done. It is easy to see, that a minister may be deterred from insisting upon certain duties and condemning certain habits and practices, by the consciousness that in so doing he must condemn himself. How can a pastor, for example, look his audience in the face and preach against intemperance, with a full clear voice, if he indulges, at the same time, in the use of wine or any other alcoholic beverage? Or against travelling on the Sabbath, if he does the same for his own convenience? Or against balls and assemblies, if he allows his own children to attend them? Or against extravagance in dress, furniture and equipage, if he vies with his fashionable neighbor in show and expense? How, if he does not restrain his own children and strive to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," can he reprove other parents for neglecting the religious education of their children? If he is close-fisted,

how can he exhort his people to be liberal? If he does not rule his own spirit, how can he preach from Prov. 16 : 32? Or from 1 Tim. 6 : 9, 10, if he covets riches? Or from Titus 2 : 6, if he is not sober-minded? If a minister were to go but once to hear some celebrated play actor, what good would it do for him ever to preach against the theatre—or if he were to appear for half an hour at a horse-race, who would ever from that day forward be deterred from going by any thing he could say against the demoralizing sports of the turf?

I am not ignorant of the answer which has sometimes been given, “Let the people mind my *preaching* and not my example,”—or in different words, perhaps, “They ought to do as I *say*, not as I *do*.” This may be very true indeed; but it is a miserable get off for a minister. He ought conscientiously to live up to the rules which he inculcates, or to abandon the pulpit and betake himself to some other employment. I once heard of a pastor, who rode ten or fifteen miles on Sabbath morning for an exchange, and having delivered two powerful discourses against *Sabbath-breaking*, ordered his horse and rode all the way back again immediately after the close of the service. This I presume was remembered as the *improvement* or *particular application* of the subject, long after the sermons themselves were forgotten. Now, my son, if you deem it your duty to preach against travelling, or sailing on the Lord’s day, as I am sure you will, let your own example bear you out, and give all the weight it can to your exhortations. Never be found in any public conveyance, whether

by land or water, on the Sabbath, if you can possibly help it. I need not tell you, that neither the going on of your fellow passengers in the cars or steamboat, though some of them should happen to be professors of religion, nor the inconvenience of lying by for a day, affords any valid excuse for proceeding.

I shall always remember with great satisfaction the Sabbath in which I was detained, quite contrary to my calculations, at a small uncomfortable place on the Illinois river, and where I had opportunity to preach the gospel to those who seldom heard it. If you should ever cross the ocean, you must of course be out on the Lord's day, and you may preach too, with a clear conscience, if you can obtain permission and can hold on with one hand by the capstan, as I myself have done, under similar circumstances; but should you ever be caught out in a steamboat, when by making better calculations you might have been at home worshipping with your own people, I advise you, instead of preaching to your fellow Sabbath breakers as you will be urged to do, to spend the day in private fasting and prayer for them and for yourself. Though you should "speak with the tongue of men and of angels, it would be as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal." Or if you must preach, by all means take the fourth commandment for your text.

In your intercourse with your people, be habitually *sober minded* — not melancholic; not unsociable; but sedate, guarded and self-possessed, as one who holds a sacred commission. Cheerful you may and ought to be; and sometimes you may be sprightly,

but you should never let yourself down by *frivolity*. Some pastors, whose preaching is of a high character, exceedingly injure their usefulness by the unguarded levity of their conversation, when they are not officially obliged to be serious. They are *ministers* on the Sabbath, in the sick room and at funerals, but on other days and elsewhere, you would hardly suspect their holy calling. Hence the significant remark, that “when in the pulpit they ought never to leave it, and when out of it ought never to return.”

When you are abroad, have a special regard to all the *proprieties of social intercourse*. Let your deportment be affable, unassuming and polite. Never say or do anything, which would be offensive in the best bred families of your congregation. It is an egregious mistake to suppose, that there is any thing in the sacred profession, which either hinders or excuses a minister from being a gentlemen. On the contrary, this is a cardinal virtue. Every clergyman ought to be a gentleman; not a man of show and ceremony, but a real gentleman in his manners, in his conversation, in all his habits and feelings. This gives him ready access to all the higher classes of his congregation, and makes him welcome in the most refined society, without disqualifying him in the slightest degree, for familiar intercourse with the poor and uneducated. Whereas, if you can suppose any one in the pastoral office to be coarse and abrupt; a sloven in his person; at a loss to know what to do with his *quid*, in a lady's drawing room; puffing his segar in the face of other invited guests; occupying two or three chairs, because they happen to be empty;

putting his feet up upon the mantle piece ; breaking down, or soiling the paper, by leaning back in his chair ; he would inevitably excite the disgust of half his people and lose the respect of all.

Make it a great object, now in the early part of your ministry, to *enrich and discipline your mind by reading and study*. However well furnished a young man may think himself to be, when he leaves the Theological Seminary, he will find his stock running low, in less than one year after he settles, if he does not replenish it. In making sermons, you will all the while be drawing out of the vessel, and must soon come down upon the lees unless you keep pouring in at the same time. But peradventure you will ask, whether, in urging you to lay out the best of your strength in preparing for the pulpit, I have not cut you off alike from thorough investigation and miscellaneous reading ? This certainly has not been my intention, and I think a little reflection will satisfy you, that there is ample room to push your theological enquiries just as far as you please, in connection with your weekly preparations for the Sabbath. When you are preaching upon the law of God, for example, it will give you a favorable opportunity, after arranging your own thoughts, to read the best and ablest books you can find on the subject. And just so when you take up depravity, or regeneration, or the atonement, or justification by faith, or any other great Bible doctrine, it gives you a fine opportunity for enriching your own mind by thorough investigation, at the same time that you are preparing ‘beaten oil’ for the Sanctuary. I believe I remarked

in a former letter that President Edwards preached the substance of his ablest treatises to his congregation in Northampton, long before he sent them to the press. In fact, nearly all the most distinguished divines of this country have risen to eminence by a similar process. The mind is stimulated by having an immediate object in view, as a minister has, when he brings the results of his intellectual labors before his people every Sabbath. Whatever time it may cost you, therefore, to write your sermons, it will be your own fault if you do not at the same time increase your stock of theological knowledge.

In regard to other studies, you cannot of course expect to find so much time for them as you might wish, and yet you need not wholly neglect them, especially as many of them are collateral to your profession, and will help to make you an abler writer and a better preacher.

With respect to *miscellaneous reading*, if you are industrious and systematic, you may at least "keep up with the times," and perhaps something more, by devoting those hours to it which you cannot safely employ in study. You can read when you cannot write. You can glance over the columns of a newspaper, when you are too much exhausted by mental effort to continue at your studies, and will even feel refreshed by the change. You can run your eye over some of the best American and Foreign periodical literature by way of relaxation from graver studies, with decided advantage. Every professional man needs something of this sort to relieve him from the tiresome round of official labors, and to give a new spring to his mind.

The great danger is, that men who are fond of reading and collecting general information will indulge themselves too far, and against this indulgence you should be particularly on your guard. If you find that it interferes with your studies or with your pastoral duties, you must deny yourself the pleasure. Study first and then reading. I have only one thing more to say before I close and that is

Take care of your health. The question is not how much work you can do in the shortest time, but how much you can accomplish in the aggregate. This will depend upon the length of your ministry; the length of your ministry will depend upon your health; and your health will depend in a great measure upon the care you take of it. You might bring yourself down to the grave in a few years or in one year, by excessive labor, and perhaps think you were "doing God service." An early and very dear friend of mine, who entered the ministry the same year that I did, was admonished by a venerable father that he was undertaking too much, and must relax or he could not hold out long, and his answer was, "I see ten reasons for doing more, where I can find one for doing less." It was better, he said, "to wear out than rust out," and he did wear out in the very prime of life. He has now been five and twenty years in his grave. He did a great deal in the few years that he lived, to be sure; but how much more would he have done, had his valuable life been prolonged, as there is reason to think it might have been by suitable care, to the present time.

I exhort you to *take care of your own health*, be-

cause if you do not, who will? It is a duty which devolves upon you rather than any one else. You know, or ought to know best, how much you can safely undertake and endure. Your friends of the church and congregation will feel anxious about you, when they see you going beyond your strength, and will sometimes very kindly tell you that you are undertaking too much, but the better they love you, the more desirous will they be to enjoy the benefit of your extra labors. While they think you are doing too much in *general*, one and another and another will want to have you do more in *particular*—each supposing that the little which *he* requires will not add anything worth mentioning to your toils. The more attached they are to you, and the more they value your preaching and pastoral attentions, the more likely will they be to kill you with kindness. They will tell you they want to have you favor yourself as much as you can, but at the same time, that they had rather see you in the pulpit, than any brother you can exchange with. They will admire your sermons and make you feel that sick or well you must keep up the standard. It is all kindly intended. They would not endanger your health on any account whatever, but the effect of over action under such a pressure is just as injurious as if an enemy had done it. The truth is, that your people do not know, and they cannot know how much you have to do, nor when you have gone as far as your health will bear. You must judge for yourself, and when you feel unable to comply with their wishes, you must say so. They may feel disappointed, and some may think

you might attend this and that meeting if you would; but acting in the fear of God and with a sincere desire to do what you can, you must stop in obedience to your own convictions of duty, let who will complain.

When, worn down with hard service at home, you go abroad to recruit, under the charge of your physician not to preach anywhere in your absence, stop your ears, and harden your heart against all the solicitations of your brethren. On this point ministers are sometimes the most unreasonable men in the world. They will importune a brother to preach till he is ashamed, when he ought rather to be in bed than in the pulpit. I charge you never to do it: Never urge an invalid to preach for you, especially if he happens to spend the Sabbath in your family, so as to feel under a sort of obligation to help you, and never yield to the solicitation of others to your own injury and the detriment of your people. They send you away to regain your health for their benefit, and you ought to do nothing to disappoint them. Attend to the following precautions, when you are engaged in the discharge of your ministerial and pastoral duties.

Exercise briskly enough in the open air, to excite perspiration, every day.

Leave off study before you are exhausted, as you leave off eating with a good appetite.

Distribute your meetings through the week, so as to equalize the labor, as far as practicable.

In coming out of evening meetings in your own neighborhood, protect your throat and lungs, and walk fast to keep up the perspiration.

If you are a mile or two from home, remain till the perspiration has subsided, and when you go out, put on plenty of clothing, or what is safer still, if the air is damp and you are much exhausted, stop with some kind parishioner till morning.

When you exchange, be more anxious to preserve your health, than to return home the same evening.

The more you have to do, the earlier you should retire, and the more attention you ought to pay to diet and exercise.

By all means and forever eschew alcohol and tobacco, as equally the abhorrence of all flesh, but *human*.

If coffee affects your nerves, or makes your brain muddy, leave it off, however fond you may be of it, and if you love cold water as well as I do, drink nothing else summer or winter.

Take a very light dinner on the Sabbath, and be careful not to indulge your appetite too freely at the supper table. Reserve your appetite for Monday, when the digestive organs will be better able to perform their office.

I might go on, but I will trouble you no further. I will only repeat the exhortation, *take care of your health*, that you may live as long, and do as much good as possible.

And now, my dear E., having gone over the ground which I marked out for myself when I commenced this series of letters, I have nothing more to add. They are before you, and I hope they may not have been written altogether in vain. I have traversed a wide field. I have touched upon a great variety of

topics. It has been a delightful task, because it has afforded me so much and such pleasant communion with a beloved and absent son.

My work is nearly done. Henceforth “I must decrease ;” but my fervent, daily prayer shall be, that you may “increase ;” that in the discharge of all your sacred duties, you may “wax strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might ;” and that having “turned many to righteousness, you may shine as the brightness of the firmament and as the stars forever and ever.” I am, my dear E., your

Affectionate Father.

END.

